

HER HUSBAND'S
WIFE

A. E. THOMAS

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HER HUSBAND'S WIFE



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HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

A Comedy in Three Acts

BY
A. E. THOMAS

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
WALTER PRICHARD EATON



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INTRODUCTION

It is never safe to take a serious man too seriously—nor a humorist too lightly. Most of the “serious” dramas of the hour are probably of less consequence than we sometimes, in our enthusiasm, suppose, and the more sprightly plays, even the farces, are often of considerably greater. Glancing back, for instance, over the past decade or two in the American theatre, the memory of many an ambitious and portentously solemn drama is, at best, but hazy, while our recollection of “The College Widow,” racy with its picture of life in a “fresh water” college, of certain comedies by Clyde Fitch, with their brisk etchings of urban butterflies, of some first act by George Cohan, lifted from the corner of Forty-second Street and Broadway, remains vivid and undimmed. The humorist (always excepting Mr. Shaw!) is seldom concerned with propaganda, nor burdened with a “message.” He has more time to give to his story for the story’s sake, and he is frequently a

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closer observer of individual types and eccentricities, of the play of character upon character, of the humors of the times, which are its manners. The public preference for comedy in the theatre is not wholly due to a distaste for high seriousness; in part at least it is due to the fact that the writers of comedy produce, on the whole, better and more vivid plays.

“Her Husband’s Wife” offers, perhaps, a case in point. Though it was written solely to be acted, with no thought of the printed page in mind, it has survived to be printed by virtue of its dramatic integrity. Frankly a whimsical farce, an “entertainment” in the most popular sense, individualizing observation, unforced humor, kindly feeling, a sense for style, preserve it for our more careful attention. It survives because it is a good play.

A. E. Thomas, the author, was born in the Berkshire Hills of Massachusetts, and was graduated from Brown University with the class of 1894. The following year he was an instructor in English at Brown, while securing his Master’s degree. He then took up newspaper work in New York City, laboring in that interesting if not always remunerative vineyard for fifteen years before “Her Husband’s Wife,”

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his first play to reach the professional stage, was produced. To be a reporter for fifteen years is to see much. To be a reporter for fifteen years and emerge uncynical and serene, however, is something of an accomplishment. To emerge, furthermore, with a sense for style still keen, and an undimmed zest for invention, is almost worthy of Peter Pan. Mr. Thomas thus emerged with "Her Husband's Wife" in his pocket.

The play was accepted by Henry Miller, who produced it at the Broad Street Theatre, Philadelphia, on February 14, 1910, with the following cast:

John Belden	.	.	.	Arthur Lewis
Richard Belden	.	.	.	Orme Caldara
Stuart Randolph	.	.	.	Robert Warrick
Irene Randolph	.	.	.	Laura Hope Crews
Emily Ladew	.	.	.	Grace Elliston
Maid	.	.	.	Nelly Roland

Rewritten slightly to make more prominent the part of Uncle John, and to introduce a new character, the Baroness von Marcken, as a foil to John, it was brought to the Garrick Theatre, New York, on May 9th of the same year, with Mr. Miller himself

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playing John, and Mabel Burt the Baroness. It ran in New York, first at the Garrick and then at the Criterion Theatre, until the July heat closed the playhouses. There was a subsequent autumn season on the road. The piece has been frequently acted in stock, ever since that time, and on at least one occasion by amateurs (the Comedy Club of New York) and promises to continue to be so acted.

The original version of "Her Husband's Wife" is the one printed here.

The reader will of course discover in the quaint character of Irene the source of the play's chief charm. Just what we mean by style in a drama is not always easy to say—certainly less easy than when we are dealing with the printed essay or novel. It is a fusion of many elements, of which mere language is perhaps the least important, though it has its place. But when we are considering a farce, a play in which the sequence of comic incident, the merry tangling of plot, determines the type, we may declare that style is or is not present according to the measure of humanity imparted to the characters, the amount of interest awakened in the people who figure in the incidents, the wit, delicacy, sprightliness of their speech; as well, of course, as according to the

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good taste and psychological value of these incidents themselves. Therefore, it is hard to say whether "The Taming of the Shrew" should be called a farce, so far toward comedy does its characterization lift it. And when we contemplate this quaint little hypochondriac, Irene, with her unknown ailments and mystic pills, especially as she was depicted by that capital comedienne, Laura Hope Crews, we are again hard put to say by just how much "Her Husband's Wife" misses comedy. Surely the interest is as great in the complications and final change in Irene's character as in the complications of the story; and that is due to the skill of the characterization, the humanity of the tale, the delicacy and sprightliness of the dialogue, far removed from the tone of door-slamming farce—in short, to the style.

Perhaps, as Mr. Walkley has somewhere said, we are giving up our old distinctions of comedy, tragedy, farce, and melodrama. Nowadays, we simply have plays. It is only natural that the closer the stage comes to life, the better our technique is fitted to create the illusion of reality, the less likely we are to write stage works set in a hard mould. Life is not so set, not even the quietest and most uneventful. Still, the old distinctions persist, and, like all tags, they

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are found useful—and, like all tags, they are abused. Our instinct is to catalogue “Her Husband’s Wife” as a farce; and yet, when we think of Irene, we distrust the term. Perhaps a more non-committal course is best. Gentle Reader—a good play!

WALTER PRICHARD EATON.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

Act 1

CHARACTERS

- STUART RANDOLPH A good-looking young husband.
RICHARD BELDEN His brother-in-law.
JOHN BELDEN . . The genial uncle of Irene and
 Richard
IRENE RANDOLPH Wife of Stuart.
EMILY LADEW . . Her friend.
NORA An elderly maid-servant.

PLACE: Saratoga.

All three acts take place in the drawing-room of the Randolphs during the racing season at the Spa.

ACT I

SCENE: *The drawing-room of the Randolph home.*

A door at L. 1 E. and another at L. 3 E. At R. 1 E. is a door, not used, in which is set a large plate-glass mirror. The entrance from the hall is an archway in the rear, right-hand corner. At the rear L. of C., are French windows, standing wide open and giving upon a comfortable veranda leading out to a lawn, beyond which is a spacious glimpse of cultivated landscape. A cuckoo clock hangs on the wall at rear. There is a grand piano in the rear, right-hand corner; upon it stands a silver frame holding a photograph of Stuart Belden. A small bench backs up against the piano. At L. C. is a table; against this, facing the audience, is backed a low, backless settee long enough to seat three persons. Chairs are at rear and R. and L. of the table. The curtains are of chintz. The floor is of hardwood covered with a handsome Persian rug. As the time is summer the decorations should avoid heaviness. An electric chandelier

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hangs C. and well down. An electric switch at rear C. controls the chandelier. Fireplace and mantel at L. between the two doors.

TIME: *Early afternoon of a warm, sunny August day.*

AT RISE: DICK *enters through centre windows at back from right, crosses to table left upper, mixes highball, drinks. Enter NORA through arch with candlesticks.*

DICK. Good afternoon, Nora.

NORA. Good afternoon, Mr. Richard.

DICK. Where is everybody?

NORA. Oh! Everybody is everywhere, sir. Mrs. Randolph is in her room. The household expected you back last night, sir.

DICK [*Placing his hat on piano*]. Yes, but things were doing. Has Mr. Belden arrived?

NORA. Oh, yes, sir, yesterday. I believe he has gone for a walk with Mr. Randolph.

DICK. What is he like, a sort of an old bear? I haven't seen him in years and years.

NORA. No, not exactly. He's not exactly old, and he's anything but a bear.

DICK. Is everybody well?

NORA. Yes, sir—excepting——

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DICK. Excepting whom?

NORA. Mrs. Randolph, sir. She's not quite herself.

DICK. Yes; I've noticed that for some time. You know, Mr. Stuart got an idea the salt air didn't agree with her—that is why we came here this summer instead of going to Bar Harbor.

NORA. Yes, sir, I know.

DICK. Suits me all right with my taste for the ponies, but it's knocked Stuart's yachting plans in the head. I must say he's been bully about it; not many men would do as much.

NORA. Ah, well, he adores her, you know, sir.

DICK. Yes, I know. Well—— [*Gets hat from piano.*] I've got to run over to the hotel a moment. If he comes in tell him I'll be right back. You know I've got a horse in Champlain stakes this afternoon—looks like a good thing, too.

NORA. I'll tell him.

[*DICK goes out through the French windows.*

Enter MR. BELDEN and STUART through the arch — STUART very warm, fanning himself with his hat; BELDEN quite cool. STUART sits on settee.]

UNCLE J. Well, Nora, here we are again.

NORA. I see you are, sir.

STUART. I say, you hit up a terrible pace. I haven't walked that much in years. Do you do much of that sort of thing out on the coast?

UNCLE J. Ask Nora; she ought to remember.

STUART. Because, if you do, I'll stay in the East.

UNCLE J. Nonsense; a bit of a stroll.

STUART. Bit of a stroll! Do you know we walked six miles?

UNCLE J. Nonsense. Now to-morrow, Stuart, you and I will take a real walk.

STUART. This will do me for a while.

NORA. By the way, sir, Mr. Richard is back. Said he'd return in a few moments to go to the races.

STUART [*Turning to BELDEN*]. Yes, I know; he thinks Huckleberry's going to win for a change.

UNCLE J. What do you think?

STUART. Oh, I don't know much about horses. I like to see them run—makes a pretty sight—but give me yachting for mine. A wet sheet and a flowing sea, as the poet says. Wow! I'm warm in these clothes. You'll have to excuse me till I put on some others.

UNCLE J. My dear boy! Now, after I've had you in training for a fortnight——

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STUART. Not for me. [*He exits L. 3 E.*]

UNCLE J. Well, Nora, where is my niece?

NORA. I believe Mrs. Randolph is in her room taking her deep-breathing exercises.

UNCLE J. I beg your pardon.

NORA. Taking her deep-breathing exercises, sir.

UNCLE J. What the deuce is that?

NORA. You'll see, sir, when you've been here a few days.

UNCLE J. Some tommy-rot or other, I suppose. It's no wonder, the life these people lead. See here, Nora, you've been with my niece ever since she was a youngster—tell me—what's the matter with her?

NORA. Matter, sir?

UNCLE J. Yes, yes. Tell me—is she quite as usual?

NORA. Quite as usual—how do you mean, sir?

UNCLE J. As to her health?

NORA. Well, sir, that's hard to say.

UNCLE J. You see her every day, you must have noticed some change in her?

NORA. Well, yes, sir. I believe I have.

UNCLE J. Tell me.

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NORA. Well, sir, of late she seems sort of quiet and kind of—well, sir, if it was me, sir, I should call it moping.

UNCLE J. Moping?

NORA. She doesn't seem to take much interest in nothing much, sir—she don't seem to care to go out much—just likes to kind of sit around the house.

UNCLE J. Does she seem nervous?

NORA. Well, no, sir. But sort of queer—a good deal, sir.

UNCLE J. Is she doctoring?

NORA. Yes, sir, she is taking medicine all the time.

UNCLE J. What kind of medicine?

NORA. I don't know, sir, several kinds—five or six, I should say.

UNCLE J. Not all at once?

NORA. Oh, no, sir. Different hours for different medicines. Keeps me all mixed up, sir, trying to remember which one comes which time.

UNCLE J. How long since you noticed this change?

NORA. Well, sir, I couldn't be sure for certain; it might be a matter of two or three months.

UNCLE J. Any change in her appearance?

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NORA. No, sir. I can't rightly say as there is. She keeps her looks something wonderful, she——

[*Enter through French windows RICHARD BELDEN, carrying a pair of racing glasses slung over his shoulder. NORA exits L. 1 E.*]

RICHARD. Well, hello, Uncle John!

UNCLE J. Why, Dick, how you have grown!

RICHARD. That's what they all say. Going to let me have a latchkey soon. You are looking fine yourself.

UNCLE J. We strive to please.

RICHARD. Well, how is steel and the dear old coast?

UNCLE J. All right, thanks. On your way to the races, I see.

RICHARD. Right the first time.

UNCLE J. Hm!

RICHARD. You needn't turn up your nose. You deal in stocks, I take to horses; I don't see you have any the best of it.

UNCLE J. You own a stable, I suppose?

RICHARD. Oh, a very small one.

UNCLE J. How much was it you paid for Huckleberry? Thirty thousand dollars—the newspapers said.

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RICHARD. Oh, not as much as that—five hundred dollars less.

UNCLE J. Broken any automobile records yet?

RICHARD. Not yet—broken the automobile, though.

UNCLE J. You're lucky it's not your neck.

RICHARD. I'm not so sure.

UNCLE J. Very likely you're right.

RICHARD. What?

UNCLE J. The life you people lead! You have all the means in the world, and what are you doing with them? Are you making anything, doing anything, getting anywhere? Yachts, horse-racing, motor cars, five suits of clothes a day! Loafing, loafing, that's what it is, and calling it society doesn't make it anything else.

RICHARD. Oh, you needn't sneer; you've been all your life with your nose to the grindstone, and what have you got to show for it? Nothing but money—money—bah!

UNCLE J. Cheer up—I won't leave it to you. It will be all right—don't you worry!

RICHARD. I don't care whether I get a cent of it—I'm not going to live my life on your model if you leave it all for a home for indigent cats.

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UNCLE J. A life of pleasure doesn't seem to have improved your manners.

RICHARD. I beg your pardon, Uncle John, I didn't mean to be nasty, but—— Well, I'm not having a good time.

UNCLE. A woman, I suppose.

RICHARD. Who told you?

UNCLE. My dear Dick, whenever a man is not having a good time it's always because there's a woman—or because there *isn't*.

RICHARD. Well, there is one this time. We met on the Riviera last winter and—we quarrelled.

UNCLE. Of course.

RICHARD. And we haven't made it up.

UNCLE. You will; you were always unlucky.

RICHARD. Never! That's the trouble. I wonder if you remember her? Miss Ladew, Emily Ladew?

UNCLE. Ladew—what? Carrington Ladew's daughter?

RICHARD. Yes, yes.

UNCLE. About thirty-five?

RICHARD. No, no.

UNCLE. Short and fat and——

RICHARD. No—no—no! Twenty-four, fair and

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slender and blue-eyed, gay and graceful and sunny, and smart and *chic*——

UNCLE [*Crossing to L.*]. Stop it, stop it, I have an engagement for dinner.

RICHARD. Well, in that case I haven't time to describe her to you.

UNCLE. Of course you never saw Miss Ladew's mother?

RICHARD. On the contrary I know her very well.

UNCLE. What? I understood you to say you were in love with Miss Ladew.

RICHARD. So I am—worse luck.

UNCLE. When Mrs. Ladew was Miss Carleton, and that was a great many years ago, I was intimately acquainted with her.

RICHARD. Really?

UNCLE. We quarrelled, thank God!

RICHARD. Oh, you confounded old misanthrope, if you mean to say——

Enter IRENE RANDOLPH at L. 1 E.

IRENE. Sorry to have been so long, Uncle John—hello, Dick, off to the races?

RICHARD. Yes. Aren't you coming?

IRENE. Not to-day.

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RICHARD. Oh, I say, Sis, you mustn't shut yourself up like this. What's the use of being in Saratoga——

IRENE [*Crossing to piano*]. It's no use, Dick. I wish you wouldn't bother me. Stuart will be out in a moment. [*She busies herself with the music on the piano.*]

RICHARD [*Apart to UNCLE JOHN*]. I say, Uncle John, I wish you'd take Sis in hand. She does nothing but mope and embroider, in Saratoga of all places! Never goes to the races or the club or anywhere. I can't make her out at all.

UNCLE [*Crossing to IRENE*]. Irene, anything on your mind?

IRENE. No, no. Of course not. Dick's a foolish boy.

Enter STUART from L. 3 E., carrying racing glasses slung over his shoulder.

STUART. Hello, Dick, old man. Hope I've not kept you waiting long. You're quite sure you won't go with us, Uncle John? It's not in your line, I know, but you might find it a pleasant novelty.

UNCLE. Thanks, there seems likely to be a full representation of the family without me.

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[STUART *goes to* IRENE.]

STUART. I'll be back early, dear; only want to see Huckleberry win the Champlain stakes, then we'll go for a drive to the lake—you and Uncle John and I. Shall we?

IRENE. If it will please you.

STUART. That's all right, then. [*Kisses her. Crosses to* UNCLE JOHN *up C., speaks aside to him.*] Would you mind pumping her a bit? She's worried about something. I've been rather disturbed about her.

RICHARD. Can't we put a bit on for you, Uncle John? You'll get three to one and Huckleberry's sure to win.

UNCLE. I never bet on sure things.

STUART. There's a sportsman for you!

UNCLE. They always lose.

[STUART and RICHARD *exit into the hall laughing and chatting.* UNCLE J. *goes to* IRENE. Well, my dear, tell me all about it just as you used to do when you were a little girl.

IRENE. Oh, Uncle John, if I only could, but I haven't told anybody anything for so long.

UNCLE. Poor child, how you must have suffered!

IRENE. Oh, I have. I have indeed—why——

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[Enter NORA L. 1 E. with a small silver tray with a bottle of green medicine, half glass water, spoon, small glass.]

Hush, here's Nora.

NORA. Your medicine, ma'am.

IRENE. Thank you.

[Cuckoo appears from clock and calls twice.]

Nora, you've brought the green bottle. Now you know this is the hour for the red one.

NORA. I'm sorry, ma'am, but I'm color blind.

IRENE. Then you must put the labels on them. On this one place a label reading "this is green" and on the other a label reading "this is red." You can read, I suppose?

NORA. Oh, yes, ma'am—print.

IRENE. Well, print the labels, then.

NORA. Excuse me, ma'am, but I only said I could read print, not print print.

IRENE. For goodness sake, go get the bottle, and I'll print the labels for you.

NORA. Very well, ma'am, thank you, ma'am.

[Exits L. 1 E., leaving tray on table. IRENE crosses L. in front of table to settee and sits.]

UNCLE. But, my dear child, what on earth are you doctoring for?

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IRENE. I don't know.

UNCLE. You don't know! Then why are you doctoring?

IRENE. Because I'm ill.

UNCLE [*Sits beside IRENE*]. Ill? You don't say so. What's the matter with you?

IRENE. I don't know.

UNCLE. You don't know?

IRENE. That's the worst of it. Nobody knows.

UNCLE. Don't the doctors know?

IRENE. No, I've had six, and what do you think?

UNCLE. Well, what do I think?

IRENE. Not one of them can find out. They all say there is nothing the matter with me.

UNCLE. You don't say so!

IRENE. But that is just to conceal their ignorance.

UNCLE. But, my dear child, when doctors agree——

IRENE. But I have something here—[*pressing hand to her heart*]*—*which tells me——

UNCLE [*Imitating her gesture*]. Something here, eh? Don't believe it. It's lied to me a hundred times.

IRENE. Dear Uncle John, I'm so glad you've come. I wanted to see you again before——

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UNCLE. Before when, my dear?

IRENE [*Rising*]. Uncle John, I shan't be with you long.

UNCLE. Eh! Going away?

IRENE. Yes—yes—to that land from whose bourne no traveller ever yet returned.

UNCLE [*Rises*]. You don't mean——

IRENE. Yes, I do.

UNCLE. Nonsense! I never saw you looking better.

IRENE. I have a presentiment. Both papa and mamma died young, and I know that I shall, too, and soon.

UNCLE. But, my dear child, your father and mother were drowned in a yachting accident.

IRENE. You see it's in the family. We're a short-lived race. [UNCLE J. *turns away with an exclamation of impatience.*] I feared you wouldn't understand. I wouldn't have told you at all—only—only——

UNCLE. Only what?

IRENE [*Sits at R. of table*]. Only I'm so distressed——

UNCLE. Where, where, my dear child?

IRENE. Oh, not about myself. It's about dear Stuart.

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UNCLE. Oh, Stuart. Doesn't he know what's the matter with him, either?

IRENE. I mean about what will become of him when I am gone.

UNCLE. Humph!

[*Enter NORA from L. 1 E., hands IRENE four-ounce vial of red medicine. IRENE busies herself pouring a few drops from bottle into spoon and then into glass of water.*]

UNCLE. I suppose one of these doctors who doesn't know what ails you is prescribing some drug of whose effect he is equally unaware?

IRENE. This isn't a doctor's prescription.

UNCLE. What is it then?

IRENE. I don't know.

UNCLE. Oh, of course!

IRENE. It was recommended to me by an intimate friend.

UNCLE. Is she taking it?

IRENE. Oh, yes.

UNCLE. Does she know what ails her?

IRENE. No, so I suppose that it is the same complaint that I am suffering from. [*Drinks.*]

UNCLE. Well, does it do her any good?

IRENE. No.

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[NORA *exits with tray into the hall.*

UNCLE. Then why are you taking the damned—I beg your pardon—I—I mean—what are you taking it for?

IRENE. Why, Uncle John, you must see that it wouldn't be right for me to give up life without a struggle. I know it's no use, but I must do what I can.

UNCLE. Well, of all the infernal rot!

IRENE. Uncle John——

UNCLE. Well?

IRENE. Please come here. [*She sits at R. in front of the piano and he joins her there.*] I want to talk to you about Stuart.

UNCLE. But——

IRENE. Please, please, I must confide in you, for I may want your help, you see—— I shouldn't mind dying so much if I were sure there would be somebody to look after him.

UNCLE. He isn't a baby.

IRENE. Ah, you don't know how dependent he is upon me. Ever since we were married I have done so many little things for him. He would be quite lost without me.

UNCLE. No doubt, no doubt.

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IRENE. I'm always at breakfast with him. I know just how many lumps of sugar he wants in his coffee, just how long he wants his eggs boiled, and I always sit up for him when he's out late.

UNCLE. You're quite sure he likes that?

IRENE. I'm quite sure it's good for him!

UNCLE. Then, of course, he doesn't like it.

IRENE. And I always put the studs in his shirts, and lay out his fresh linen—and throw away his collars.

UNCLE. That *is* an attention.

IRENE. When they get frayed, I mean, and the servants too——

UNCLE. I thought he engaged the servants, himself. In fact, he told me so.

IRENE. Yes—[*rising proudly*—]but I discharge them!

UNCLE. You're a brave girl. [*Takes her hand.*]

IRENE. Well, you see, don't you?

UNCLE. Well, I see that you're a foolish little girl.

IRENE. There—there—there, but don't you see that I've got to provide for Stuart's future? I couldn't die happy unless I knew that I had done my best to provide for him.

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UNCLE. Well, I'm a director of two orphan asylums. I daresay I might get him admitted.

IRENE. Oh, Uncle John—— Ah, you will misunderstand me—— But I don't care. My sense of duty as Stuart's wife will help me to carry out my plans even if my father's brother will not.

UNCLE. My poor misguided girl, can't you see——

IRENE. I can see that Stuart must have a wife even if I am not it—I mean she.

UNCLE. What the deuce——

IRENE. I know a girl who made her husband swear——

UNCLE. Oh, many do.

IRENE. Made her husband swear never, never to marry again after she died, but he did, within a year.

UNCLE. The wretch!

IRENE. Now, I don't intend to make any such mistake. I intend that Stuart shall have a wife——

UNCLE. Ah!——

IRENE. But——

UNCLE. But—now we shall see.

IRENE. I intend to pick her out.

UNCLE. Pick her out?

IRENE. In point of fact I *have* picked her out.

UNCLE. You've laid by a wife for a rainy day?

IRENE. Some one that will do for him all the little things I have tried in my poor weak way to do. Some one who will be to him all that I have been.

UNCLE. Well, certainly, there's not a jealous bone in your body!

IRENE [*Significantly*]. And yet, not quite all.

UNCLE. She's quite like you then, your husband's second wife?

IRENE. In some ways, yes, in other ways not at all like me.

UNCLE. Ah, I see. She wouldn't remind Stuart of you, then.

IRENE. She wouldn't be likely to make him forget me. I have considered the matter as you may well believe, with the utmost care, and I think she'll do.

UNCLE. Of course it is a mere formality, but—have you spoken to her on the subject?

IRENE. No—and that's where I want your help.

UNCLE [*Rising in perturbation*]. Oh, that will be nice.

IRENE. She's an old schoolmate of mine. We were at Elderby Hall together. She's lived abroad most of the time since, and has just returned; only got to Saratoga yesterday, in fact. I wonder if you

remember her? She's the dearest little woman, so quiet and retiring and modest and——

UNCLE. And plain, eh?

IRENE. Oh, not plain, exactly, but not showy. I should call her motherly.

UNCLE. As bad as that?

IRENE. She's had some sorrow in her life—a love affair, I believe.

UNCLE. No woman is too plain for that, thank heaven!

IRENE. Ah, but it's all over and done with forever and the poor thing naturally is a little depressed about it.

UNCLE [*Indulgently*]. Oh, I think we may allow her that privilege.

IRENE. I thought so. I wonder if you'll remember her. Her name is Ladew—Emily Ladew.

UNCLE. Ladew? Good gracious—Ladew——

[*Enter NORA from the hall, announces "Miss Ladew."* EMILY LADEW comes in. She is a little woman, dressed inconspicuously and plainly; brushes her hair straight back from her forehead and presents an appearance which, despite her comparative youth, is on the whole rather dowdy. Her manner is re-

served and in fact just falls short of being shy.]

IRENE. My dear Emily, I'm so glad to see you. I was almost afraid you weren't coming. This is Mr. Belden, my uncle. Uncle John, this is my old friend, Miss Ladew.

UNCLE. How do you do, and I hope you are quite well. And your mother? I used to know her before her marriage—how is her health?

MISS LADEW. Mother was quite well when I left her in Carlsbad.

UNCLE [*Embarrassed and struggling for words*]. And your father—I—I—I hope he's quite well.

MISS LADEW. Father has been dead six years.

UNCLE [*Rattled*]. Oh, I beg—I beg your pardon—I—I——

MISS LADEW [*Gravely*]. But both my sisters are in good health and brother Jim was never better.

[UNCLE J. *retires in confusion*.]

IRENE. Do come and sit down, dear—— [EMILY *sits on settee*; IRENE *on chair R. of table L.C.*] My dear Emily, you can't think how glad I am to see you back in this country.

MISS LADEW. You're very kind, I'm sure.

IRENE. For two reasons. In the first place I was

always fond of you. [UNCLE J. *edges away.*] But I am particularly glad to see you now, because you can do for me the greatest possible service one woman can possibly do another.

MISS LADEW. Yes, and please what is that?

UNCLE J. [*Nervously*]. I think I'll go and smoke on the veranda.

[*Starts to go; IRENE rises, crosses up to UNCLE J., brings him down L. of table.*]

IRENE. Oh, please, please, Uncle John, I want you to stay. We both want you to stay, don't we, Emily, dear?

MISS LADEW. Why, of course. [*They all sit.*]

IRENE. My dear Emily, I know you'll be sorry to learn that I have reason to believe that I shan't live very long.

MISS LADEW. Eh?

IRENE. Yes, it's true. I knew you'd be sorry.

UNCLE. Nevertheless, Miss Ladew, it's distinctly nice of you to be sorry.

MISS LADEW. But I don't understand. I didn't know you were ill.

IRENE. Nobody knows it but you and Uncle John. I haven't told a soul. I didn't want to worry them, especially Stuart.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

UNCLE. Yes, Miss Ladew, it's to be our little secret. No one must ever know.

MISS LADEW. But the doctors—can't they do anything?

UNCLE. Ah, they're not in the secret.

IRENE. No, I've tried several, and none of them does any good. It's no use. I've made up my mind to the inevitable. I'm not asking you for sympathy, dear. I know you'll give me that, but I want something more than that.

MISS LADEW. Why, of course, anything in the world I can do.

IRENE. Wait till you hear what I want.

UNCLE. Ah! Wait! Wait!

IRENE. I—I—admit that it's a great favor I'm asking—a very great favor. I want,—in fact I'm only asking it of you because of the confidence I feel in you. I don't know another woman I could ask it of.

UNCLE. I can't think of one either.

IRENE. I want you to promise me that—that when I'm gone—— [She chokes up and turns on UNCLE J.] Oh, you tell her, Uncle John.

UNCLE. I? No, thank you. [Backing hastily away.]

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

IRENE. Oh, you will, won't you, dear Uncle John? I—I can't seem to bring myself to it.

UNCLE. Why bring me to it?

IRENE. I know it's all right, but I can't seem to help thinking that it would be indelicate for me to say it myself. Please, please, please——

[UNCLE J. *gives up after a struggle and goes to*
MISS L.]

UNCLE. My dear young lady, the proposal my niece has to make to you is that you shall agree to—er—sort of—as you might say—marry her husband.

MISS LADEW. What!

UNCLE. In the event of her death of course.

MISS LADEW. Well, I—I—I never heard of such a thing!

IRENE. Oh, don't make me the most miserable of women by saying no; you can't think what it means to me. I shall die happy if I have your promise. Uncle John, do help me to persuade her.

MISS LADEW. Do you approve of this plan, Mr. Belden?

UNCLE. At first I must say that I was violently opposed to it.

MISS LADEW. Ah!

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

UNCLE. But that was before I knew my niece had you in mind.

MISS LADEW. Ah, indeed!

UNCLE. You see I once knew your charming mother.

MISS LADEW. You must admit it is a most extraordinary proposal. I haven't seen Mr. Randolph for years.

IRENE. All the better. I mean that would make no difference. You're sure to get on with Stuart—isn't she, Uncle John?

UNCLE. Oh, yes; anybody can get on with Stuart.

[IRENE is not wholly pleased by this observation.]

MISS LADEW. I—really—I can't imagine where you got such a notion; it's—it's quite impossible—impossible!

IRENE. My dear, my dear—don't break my heart like this. I——

MISS LADEW. No, I couldn't do it, really. Of course, I'm sorry for you and all that, but really,—you mustn't ask me,—I couldn't do it. [*She turns away decisively.*]

IRENE. Oh, Uncle John!

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

Enter NORA with silver card tray, on which is a letter.

NORA. For Mr. Richard, ma'am, and the messenger says there'll be an answer.

[At the mention of the name MISS LADEW pricks up her ears.]

IRENE. Mr. Richard is at the races; tell the man the answer must wait till he returns.

[NORA goes out.]

MISS LADEW *[With covert interest]*. Is your brother Richard staying with you here?

IRENE. Yes, we're all here for the season.

MISS LADEW *[Suddenly]*. I think I'd better be going.

IRENE. Emily, you're horribly cruel. Won't you try just for a moment to put yourself in my place?

MISS LADEW. As I understand it, that is exactly what you propose.

IRENE. I wouldn't dream of asking it of you if I didn't know from your own lips that the one love affair of your life was over and done with; you told me so, didn't you?

MISS LADEW *[Sadly and slowly]*. Yes, we agreed, he and I, that it was over and done with—forever.

IRENE. Will nothing induce you? Oh, I'm sure

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

you'd like Stuart; he's the dearest boy, and you could do so much for him. I can't think of another woman I'd be willing to trust him to.

UNCLE. Think of that, Miss Ladew!

MISS LADEW. Yes, I *am* thinking! It's a great honor.

IRENE. Yes, dear.

MISS LADEW. But, are you sure he'd like me?

IRENE. Of course he would—that is, well enough.

UNCLE. Still, that end of the matter is yet to be arranged.

MISS LADEW. Suppose, suppose he shouldn't. That would be rather awkward for me, eh?

IRENE. Oh, I've thought that all out. Of course I shouldn't tell him I had said a word to you.

MISS LADEW. I should think not.

IRENE. I'd simply tell him such a match was my last wish, and make him promise to try to win you. Oh, you need have no fear on that ground. Stuart would do anything to please me.

UNCLE. Ahem!

MISS LADEW. That's extremely gratifying.

IRENE. Then you will, will you?

MISS LADEW. Understand, I wouldn't think of doing such a thing for anybody but you, but——

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

IRENE. Then you will, you will!

MISS LADEW. I'll think it over.

IRENE [*Seizing her hands*]. Oh, please, please say you will!

UNCLE. Irene would do as much for you, I'm sure.

MISS LADEW. Well, you see, it's been so long since I've seen Stuart——

UNCLE. Stuart! Ah—getting on.

MISS LADEW. I mean, of course, Mr. Randolph. Don't misunderstand me, dear. Of course there could never be any sentimental nonsense between him and me. What I mean *is* that there are some men, though they might be nice enough, whom I couldn't marry, even to oblige a friend.

IRENE. Oh, you needn't worry about that. You'll find Stuart attractive. [*Choking back a sob.*] Yes, very attractive.

MISS LADEW. Tell me, dear, what is he like?

IRENE. You tell her, Uncle John; I—I may be prejudiced.

UNCLE [*Cheerfully taking up the task*]. Oh, he's not deformed in any way.

IRENE. Uncle John!

UNCLE. Well, is he?

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

IRENE. Of course he isn't.

UNCLE [*To Miss L.*]. There, what did I say? He's got the usual number of legs and arms, and so far as I know, teeth.

IRENE. Uncle John!

UNCLE. Hasn't he? I'm positive about the legs and arms, though I may be wrong about the teeth; but we can refer you to his dentist.

IRENE. I think you're perfectly horrid. [*On the verge of tears.*] You know Stuart is a most attractive man. Do you think I'd have married him if he weren't?

UNCLE. You see, Miss Ladew, it is entirely useless to proceed in the face of these interruptions.

MISS LADEW. Perhaps I'd better wait and——

UNCLE. Inspect the goods yourself, eh?

MISS LADEW. Oh, no, not that at all.

[*EMILY crosses to IRENE.*

You mustn't mind him, my dear; what I mean is—that there are people that other people find most agreeable—who—who—well, who rub you the wrong way, don't you know. I shouldn't like to promise you and then have to change my mind.

IRENE. Ah, I see, dear, of course, but I know it will be all right. [*Putting her arms around EMILY's*

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

neck.] Oh, Emily, Emily, how can I ever thank you enough? If you knew how much it meant to me.

[NORA meanwhile has entered, with silver tray, on which is a half glass of water, and a small powder, done up doctor fashion.]

The anxious hours I have spent!

[Cuckoo appears from clock. Calls once. Disappears.]

NORA. Your powder, ma'am.

IRENE [Crossing to NORA]. Oh, to be sure, it is the hour for the powder.

[During the following scene, IRENE is busy unwrapping powder, putting it in water, etc.]

UNCLE. Another one of your intimate friend's remedies that doesn't do any good for you don't know what.

IRENE. Oh, no, I bought the powders of an agent.

UNCLE. Good Lord!

IRENE. You needn't turn up your nose at that. She was the dearest, sweetest little thing you ever saw.

UNCLE. Humph!

IRENE. And she told me she had three fatherless children to support. [She swallows the powder.]

MISS LADEW. But, these powders—do they do you any good?

IRENE. Oh, no.

MISS LADEW. Then why——

UNCLE. Didn't you hear her say that the agent has three fatherless children? Now, what more do you want?

MISS LADEW. Yes, I know; of course it is all right to buy her medicine; but why take it, why not throw it away?

IRENE. My dear, that would be practically making her a present.

MISS LADEW. Well, what of it?

IRENE. She wouldn't like that, I'm sure. She's much too independent.

UNCLE. But you needn't tell her you don't take the stuff.

IRENE. I couldn't think of deceiving her; she'd be very angry, I'm sure.

UNCLE. Well, of all the——

MISS LADEW. Mr. Belden, of course she would, can't you see that?

UNCLE [*Going close to her*]. I can see that you're a very kind young woman to come to the help of my poor unfortunate niece in her dilemma.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

MISS LADEW. Oh, you mean—— [*Embarrassed—cannot meet his shrewd and humorous gaze.*]

UNCLE. And—er—I—er—I wish—you luck.

MISS LADEW. Thank you. [*Gives him a suspicious glance. NORA goes out.*]

UNCLE. I didn't mention it before because I knew such a consideration—would have no weight with a woman—er—that is—a girl of your character, but as a matter of fact, Stuart is well provided with the goods of this world.

MISS LADEW [*Smiling*]. Oh, is he?

IRENE. Yes, Uncle John is quite right.

UNCLE. And take it all around from a worldly point of view, I think I am abundantly able to most sincerely congratulate you upon your approaching marriage. [*They shake hands effusively.*]

MISS LADEW. It's very nice of you, I'm sure.

Enter NORA.

NORA. Miss Jenkins.

[*The hotel band is heard 'in the distance playing "The Barcarrole" from "The Tales of Hoffmann."*]

IRENE. It's the agent. Ask her to wait. [*To EMILY*] You'll excuse me, dear, just a moment,

won't you? How good you are to me in my trouble. I shall be grateful to you for ever and ever. [*Kisses her on both cheeks.*] I shan't be long, dear. [*She goes out into the hall. MISS LADEW strides up rear and then down C., her anger mounting.*]

MISS LADEW. It's an insult, an insult!

UNCLE. Now, my dear.

MISS LADEW. I tell you I was never so insulted in my life! Why—it—it—it—it—it's perfectly outrageous! I'm the only woman in the world she'd ask it of, am I? She wouldn't dream of asking it of anybody else, wouldn't she? She'll die happy if she has my promise, will she? She'll—— [*UNCLE J. crossing to her trying to take her hands.*]

UNCLE. My dear Miss Ladew, you really mustn't allow yourself——

MISS LADEW [*Flouncing away from him to R.*] Don't touch me. I—I—I—I—I'm not responsible. It—it's the most outrageous piece of insolence I ever heard of!!

UNCLE. Then you won't do it, eh?

MISS LADEW. Do it? I wouldn't miss it for the world!

UNCLE. Then you will?

MISS LADEW [*Crosses to him*]. Do it? Well, I

should say I will. Do you think I'll let that woman calmly—oh—I don't care if she is your niece—no woman is going to tell me to my face that I'm so—— [*Stops as if struck by an idea; crosses to mirror at door down R. 2.*] Well, no woman, whether it is Irene Randolph or anybody else—— [*Examining her appearance in the mirror.*] I don't care who it is, I tell you, no woman is going to make any such—— [*Looking at herself in mirror, patting her hair, straightening her hat, etc.*] I admit I am not the most fascinating woman in the world at present——

UNCLE. Oh, my dear Miss——

MISS LADEW [*Interrupting*]. But when a woman doesn't care she can be very, very unattractive.

UNCLE. And haven't you cared?

MISS LADEW. You may not have observed it, but when a woman makes up her mind that she's going to be an old maid she—she——

UNCLE. Sort of goes to pieces, eh?

MISS LADEW. Well, she—she deteriorates.

UNCLE. Surely you don't expect to be an old maid?

MISS LADEW. Well, I have deteriorated. [*Jams hat over one ear.*] But, I didn't know it was as bad as your niece seems to think. Oh, every time I think of it my blood begins to boil. I——

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

UNCLE. Suppose we go and listen to the band?

MISS LADEW. Let me tell you that I've not lived five years in Paris for nothing, though I may not look it at this moment. Mark my word, Irene Randolph will regret the day she tried to make a trained nurse out of me. [*Crosses to windows at back.*]

UNCLE [*Pursuing her*]. Shall we go and hear the band?

MISS LADEW. Besides, I have other reasons.

UNCLE. I begin to believe you're a very clever young person.

MISS LADEW. Heavens! Don't tell a soul.

[*They go out through the French windows.*]

Enter STUART *from the hall, crosses to back of table L. C., takes cigarette from jar on table, and lights it.*

STUART. Poor old Dick!

Enter RICHARD, *slowly and dejectedly; Crosses to chair R. of table, sits.*

Oh, come, cheer up, Dick; have a cigarette.

RICHARD. No, thanks!

STUART. Have a drink?

RICHARD. No, thanks.

STUART. Oh, I say, old fellow, don't be so down-

hearted. After all, Huckleberry only picked up a nail. Matthews says he will be all right again in a couple of weeks.

RICHARD. Oh, Matthews! It's always a trainer's principal business to jolly an owner along. I don't believe the colt will ever face the starter again.

STUART. Well, it *is* a bit of hard luck, if you like.

RICHARD. I wouldn't mind so much if he could only have done it in a race, but in a beastly warming-up gallop! It's tough! Not even to see your colors in the Champlain. But that's always the way. Horse wasn't fit for the Brooklyn—got left at the start in the Suburban. Here we've got him on edge with the best boy in the business to ride and a feather on his back and—then he goes and picks up a nail twenty minutes before the race. I'd sell the whole lot for eight dollars.

STUART. Oh, pshaw, buck up, my boy. Luck's sure to come your way soon. I wonder what's become of Irene and Uncle John?

[Exits into the hall. Enter, through French window from L., MISS LADEW, followed by UNCLE JOHN.]

UNCLE. Now be calm, my dear, be calm.

MISS LADEW. Calm, is it? Well, we'll see.

[Sees RICHARD.]

UNCLE. Richard!

MISS LADEW. Dick!

RICHARD. Emily!

MISS LADEW. I beg your pardon, Mr. Belden.

RICHARD. I beg your pardon, Miss Ladew.

[UNCLE J. *exits hastily, after sizing up the situation, through French window.*]

This is rather a surprise, you know.

MISS LADEW. Yes, isn't it?

RICHARD. I had no idea you were in this country.

MISS LADEW. I only came last week.

RICHARD. You—you have changed a bit.

MISS LADEW [*Angrily*]. So I've been told. [*Takes another look at herself in the mirror.*]

RICHARD. I—er—I'm glad—I'm er—I'm glad to see you.

MISS LADEW. I had not the least idea you were here, otherwise I should not—of course.

RICHARD. Oh, of course not, of course not.

MISS LADEW [*Turning to face him quickly*]. All the same I was right.

RICHARD. I have no wish to renew an old con-

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

troversy with you, Miss Ladew. I thought we agreed upon that at all events.

Enter IRENE and STUART from the hall.

IRENE [*As she comes down*]. Remember, I want you to be very, very nice to her.

STUART. Why, of course, my dear.

IRENE. My dear Emily, let me present my husband. Stuart, this is my dearest friend, Emily Ladew.

STUART [*Shaking MISS L.'s hand cordially*]. We are certainly most delighted to see you, Miss Ladew; may I hope that we shall be great friends, great friends.

MISS LADEW. It's very good of you. I don't see why we shouldn't.

[MISS LADEW and STUART commence to talk in a very animated manner; RICHARD, who is L., and IRENE, who is R. C., commence to show signs of displeasure at the way STUART and EMILY are chatting; IRENE, after the chatter has gone on for several moments, speaks.]

IRENE. I see that you and Richard have renewed your acquaintance.

MISS LADEW [*Looking up*]. Eh? [*Glances shortly*

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

at RICHARD.] Oh, yes. [*Quickly to STUART, smiling sweetly.*] Do you find Saratoga very pleasant?

STUART [*Laughingly*]. At this moment, very. Won't you sit down?

[MISS LADEW *sits on settee*; STUART *sits at her R.* They resume their animated conversation, every now and then bursting out in delighted laughter. RICHARD crosses above table to R. of IRENE, who is R. C. IRENE tries to concentrate on her talk with RICHARD, but glances occasionally with apprehension at STUART and MISS LADEW.]

IRENE. So poor old Huckleberry picked up a nail, eh? You do seem to have the worst luck.

RICHARD [*Also observing the other pair*]. Don't I?

IRENE. Going to give it up?

RICHARD. I don't know. [*Burst of laughter from STUART and EMILY.*]

IRENE [*With a look over her shoulder at her husband and MISS L.*]. Don't you think she's the—I mean—don't you think that turf is a rather unsatisfactory sort of amusement?

STUART [*To MISS L. laughingly*]. Oh, I say now, really, well, by Jove! that *is* good!

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

RICHARD [*To IRENE*]. They—they seem to be doing rather well, don't they?

IRENE [*Indignantly*]. Well—— [*Changing her manner to one of innocence.*] Why—I don't know what you mean? Oh, Stuart!

[*STUART, who is still chatting with MISS LADEW with his back turned toward his wife, doesn't hear.*]

IRENE. Stuart! [*STUART still doesn't hear.*] Stuart!

[*STUART turns, rises, and steps towards her.*]

STUART. Oh, I beg your pardon, my dear; isn't it jolly? Miss Ladew's promised to dine with us all at the club to-night and to go driving with us in the morning. [*To MISS L.*] And would you prefer polo or the races in the afternoon?

MISS LADEW [*Rising*]. Really, it doesn't matter. I don't mind what I'm doing so long as I have nice people around me, but I must be getting back to auntie. [*To STUART.*] What time will you call for me?

STUART. Oh, about seven, if that will suit.

MISS LADEW. Seven will do admirably. [*To IRENE.*] Until then, dear—— [*Kissing her very effusively.*] I think I'll go back through the park. [*She goes up to the French windows.*]

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

[IRENE crosses to L. of table, rubbing the hated kiss off with handkerchief.]

STUART [*To Miss L.*]. This way.

MISS LADEW. Thank you. Good-bye. Good-bye.

[*She goes out breezily through the French windows, STUART waving her a farewell.*]

STUART [*Calling after her*]. Good-bye! Seven o'clock, don't forget. Good-bye! Well, by Jove, she's a nice girl!

[*He turns, as he speaks, to face IRENE and RICHARD, who both feel indignant and rather badly treated, without knowing exactly why.*]

Quick Curtain

ACT II

ACT II

TIME: *Three days later. Half-past five in the afternoon.*

AT RISE: NORA *enters from the hall with tray and telegram, crosses down and exits L. 1 E. as* UNCLE JOHN *enters through the French windows.*

UNCLE. Well, nobody at home?

Enter NORA L. 1 E. with tray.

Well, Nora, how's the invalid?

NORA [*L. of table*]. Well, sir, she's so troubled.

UNCLE [*Sitting R. of table*]. That's just what Irene needs. Her trouble is that life has been too easy. When a woman has absolutely nothing on earth to worry about, then look out. If she has no troubles she'll invent some, and those are always the worst. If you want to keep a woman perfectly happy, always keep her well supplied with trouble.

[NORA *goes out in the hall laughing. IRENE enters from L. 1 E.*]

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

[*Rising*]. Well, my dear.

IRENE [*Faintly*]. Hello, Uncle John.

UNCLE. Any news of Stuart?

IRENE. He's coming back this afternoon. I just had a wire.

UNCLE. Well, you don't seem very glad.

IRENE. Of course I'm glad. I don't have to grin like a monkey to show I'm glad.

UNCLE. Grin? Of course not. But how's anybody to know you're glad if you go about looking like the nearest relative of the late lamented. I don't believe you really care for Stuart.

IRENE. Ah, Uncle John, you know it's just because I care for him so much that I——

[*Cuckoo appears from clock and calls once.*

IRENE *gives a sudden start.*]

Oh!

UNCLE. What's the matter?

IRENE. It's only half-past five. For a moment I thought it was time for the powder. [*Sits down by the table*]

UNCLE. Your husband hasn't seen much of his fiancée yet.

IRENE [*With a touch of displeasure*]. No, not yet.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

UNCLE. Hard luck for the poor chap to have to tear himself away the very night of his engagement.

IRENE. I—I believe I shall learn to hate you.

UNCLE. Hate me? Why, my dear child—hate me—me who have watched over your infant years with tender solicitude.

IRENE. Humph!

UNCLE. Hate your old Uncle who's doing the best he can to help your husband get a good wife. You're certainly a most ungrateful girl.

IRENE [*Rising*]. But, Uncle, you——

UNCLE. If you only knew how rare a thing a good wife is. I've been trying over forty years and haven't got one yet—not even one!

IRENE. You're too particular!

UNCLE. Hm! Well, maybe I am. I know it's foolish to be finicky about such a trifle. Speaking of wives—have you seen Miss Ladew?

IRENE. No! And that's what's troubling me. I haven't seen her since that day—when——

UNCLE. Not since we asked her to—er—join the family?

IRENE. N—no—not since then. You know Stuart got a wire that very evening calling him to New York, and since then I haven't seen her. I

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

planned to call, but—well, somehow, I haven't done it, and she hasn't been here.

UNCLE [*Taking her hand*]. Then you don't know whether she's going to make Stuart a happy man or not?

IRENE [*Indignantly*]. I think you might choose your words more carefully.

UNCLE [*Taking her hand, his eyes falling on her arm*]. My dear girl, what is that bruise on your wrist?

IRENE. What? Oh, that's nothing. I just jammed it in the door the other day.

UNCLE. Well, I'll go for a stroll, I think. I—er—had something of importance to say to you, but you don't seem to be in the mood. [*Starts to go.*]

IRENE. Something about Emily?

UNCLE. Well—er—yes.

IRENE [*Detaining him*]. Oh, do tell me! I didn't mean to be horrid. Really, I didn't.

UNCLE. It's—er—it won't be pleasant, but it's something I think you ought to know.

IRENE. Well—well?

UNCLE. Have—you—er—have you seen as much of Dick lately as usual?

IRENE [*Significantly*]. Ah!

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

UNCLE. Because I have!

IRENE. Hm-m!

UNCLE. Now, don't be hard on Dick.

IRENE. Eh?

UNCLE. Well, the fact is, every time I have seen Dick for the last three days I have observed him in the company of a person in whom—well, you know it's really quite too painful to talk about.

IRENE [*Sharply*]. I suspected as much!

UNCLE. But you don't know who I mean.

IRENE. Of course I know. You mean Emily Ladew.

UNCLE. Well—yes. You're right. Of course, I may be mistaken, but it looks to me as if the fellow actually had the face to be in love with her.

IRENE [*Incredulously*]. What!

UNCLE. Does seem ridiculous, doesn't it?

IRENE. Why, it's preposterous!

UNCLE. Absurd!

IRENE. And yet—if he is—it's outrageous. [*Turns to face him.*] What's to become of my plan? What's to become of Stuart? Why—I—I—I simply won't hear of it. Where on earth could I find another woman like Emily Ladew?

UNCLE. To be sure, but—if you could have seen

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

the way Dick looked at her last night as he was handing her into her carriage at the club!

IRENE. Ugh! I won't believe it of him. Dick's always been the dearest of brothers. And now, if he goes—and—and——

[*Her feelings overwhelm her. Enter RICHARD through French window. He is dressed in a light summer suit and carries a straw hat and a stick.*]

RICHARD. Afternoon, good people, and the top of it to you! Well, I say—— [*With an uneasy attempt to laugh.*] What's the matter with you two? You look positively dyspeptic.

IRENE [*In a cold voice*]. I am ready to hear your apologies.

RICHARD. Eh? Apologies?

UNCLE. Don't fail to make them very abject.

IRENE. You seem to have forgotten that you have a sister.

UNCLE. And an uncle.

RICHARD. I—I don't understand you in the least.

IRENE. Humph!

UNCLE. Likewise humph!

RICHARD. Well, well, damn it all! What's the matter?

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

IRENE. Richard!

UNCLE. Oh, Richard, if you only knew how you shock me!

RICHARD. Isn't one of you capable of speaking a sensible word? I ask you what's eating you and Irene says "Humph" and you say——

UNCLE. Humph!

RICHARD. Exactly. If a man can't swear under these circumstances when the devil can he? [*He makes as if to go.*]

UNCLE [*Detaining him*]. Richard! Richard, the fact is that your behavior of the past three days—let me see—— [*Counts on his fingers.*] One, two, three,—yes, three days, has been most distressing to your sister and—er—to myself also.

IRENE [*Stifling a sob*]. Yes, most distressing, Richard.

RICHARD [*Going to IRENE*]. Why, my poor Sis, what have I done?

IRENE [*Avoiding him*]. Oh! Oh! Don't touch me—please—please.

UNCLE. Allow me to suggest that we proceed more in order. Be seated.

[UNCLE sits down. IRENE sits on chair at R. of table; RICHARD sits on chair L. of piano.]

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

There is a pause, broken by a formal cough from UNCLE JOHN.]

RICHARD. Well, out with it, out with it. Now, what the devil do you want?

IRENE. Richard!

UNCLE. I must ask you to moderate your diction, sir. Now tell me this: Am I right in supposing that I saw you at the club last evening?

RICHARD. I was there.

UNCLE. And yesterday in a box at the races?

IRENE. Oh! Oh! [*Rises.*]

RICHARD [*Rising irritably*]. Now, Sis, for heaven's sake——

IRENE. Oh, Richard——

UNCLE. Tut, tut, tut! Sit down! Sit down!! Sit down!!! [*Motions for them to sit; they resume their seats.*] Answer me, please.

RICHARD. I was at the races, yes.

UNCLE. Am I or am I not mistaken in thinking that I met you driving yesterday morning on the Lake Road?

RICHARD. I was driving on the Lake Road. Why not?

UNCLE. You hear the man, Irene?

IRENE [*Moaning*]. Yes, oh, yes.

RICHARD. What the devil are you driving at? Are you complaining that I cut you? I give you my word I didn't see you, sir.

UNCLE [*To IRENE*]. You see, Irene, he didn't see me.

IRENE. I suppose he was too much occupied otherwise.

RICHARD [*Cheerfully*]. Certainly, certainly, that was it!

UNCLE [*To IRENE*]. You see, my poor girl, he admits it.

RICHARD. Admits what? I should like to know what the deuce I admit.

UNCLE. Richard, answer me, and truthfully, if you can, for it's a matter of vital importance. On these three occasions at the club, at the races, and on the Lake Road, in whose company were you?

RICHARD. Why, I was with Miss Ladew.

IRENE [*Rising*]. Miss Ladew——!

[*IRENE and UNCLE JOHN carry on a conversation in moderate tones concerning RICHARD'S delinquencies, ignoring his presence meanwhile.*]

UNCLE. I thought so.

RICHARD [*Seated*]. Well, why shouldn't I be with

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

MISS LADREW? [IRENE and UNCLE J. are talking, ignoring RICHARD] Why shouldn't I be with Miss Ladew? [*They do not answer.*]

RICHARD [*Shouting in UNCLE JOHN'S ear*]. Why shouldn't I be with Miss Ladew?

UNCLE [*Hands over his ears. To IRENE*]. Oh!

IRENE. Richard—— [*She turns away.*]

RICHARD. Stop! You've gone too far. You've given me hints, insinuations, innuendos; now you've got to tell me what you mean.

UNCLE. Really, my dear fellow——

RICHARD [*Angrily*]. What do you mean? Out with it!

UNCLE. Well, if you must know, we've reason to believe that Miss Ladew is engaged.

RICHARD. What?

UNCLE. It's a fact, my dear chap.

RICHARD. Why—why—I don't believe it.

UNCLE. Ask Irene.

RICHARD. Is this true, Irene?

IRENE. Well, Richard, she—she told me so herself—that is, she wrote me about it.

RICHARD. What's the fellow's name?

IRENE. I don't like your tone, Richard. He isn't a fellow. He's a gentleman.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

RICHARD. Well, fellow or gentleman, what's his confounded name?

UNCLE [*Uneasily*]. We—er—shouldn't be justified in mentioning it. The announcement was made to me, as I may say—hm-m, confidentially.

RICHARD. Some one I know?

IRENE. Yes—I believe so. Isn't he, Uncle John?

UNCLE. Ah—er—such is my impression.

RICHARD. Is he here at Saratoga?

UNCLE. Really, my dear Richard, you must excuse me.

RICHARD. Very well, I'll go and ask Miss Ladew.

[*Starts up C.; stopped by* UNCLE.

IRENE and UNCLE. No, no, not for worlds!

RICHARD. And why not? Surely a discarded lover has some rights.

IRENE. Eh? [*IRENE and UNCLE J. look at each other in consternation.*]

RICHARD. Miss Ladew was recently engaged to me.

IRENE. What?

RICHARD. Yes, it's true.

IRENE. Good heavens! [*She sinks down on the settee.*]

UNCLE. But, my dear boy, even granting that——

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

RICHARD. I ought to know, I think. Didn't I tell you?

UNCLE [*Hastily*]. Yes, yes, of course, of course, but, even so, we must ask you not to mention it to her. Don't you see she might imagine we told you?

RICHARD. What do I care for that? [*Starts to go; stopped by* UNCLE.]

UNCLE. But I have already told you that the announcement was made to us in confidence. Am I right, Irene?

IRENE. Yes, oh, yes!

UNCLE. I shouldn't have dreamed of mentioning it to you but for the fact that certain things that came under my notice seemed to indicate that you—er—well—well, you understand.

RICHARD [*Dazed*]. Yes—I—suppose I do.

UNCLE. I must say that I'm disappointed in Miss Ladew. I did not think her the sort of young woman to lead a man on, right, as I may say, in the shadow of her engagement to another. I trust, Irene, that you will make it your business to point out to her——

IRENE. I shall, indeed.

RICHARD. No, no, for heaven's sake, don't say a word about it to her, I beg of you.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

UNCLE. And why not?

RICHARD. Don't you see how ridiculous it would make me? It would look as if I'd been complaining.

IRENE. Very well, if you don't wish it, Richard.

RICHARD. Heaven forbid!

UNCLE [*Comfortingly*]. Poor old chap!

RICHARD. Well, I've got to go and fight it out. Good-bye, Uncle John. [*They shake hands.*]

UNCLE. Good-bye, Richard.

IRENE. Good-bye, Richard.

RICHARD. Good-bye, Irene. [*Shakes her hand.*]
It was nice of you both to tell me. [*Goes to door into hall.*]

UNCLE. Shall we see you at dinner?

RICHARD [*In doorway*]. Dinner! [*Goes hastily out.*]

IRENE [*Sits on settee*]. Oh, Uncle John, I feel guilty!

UNCLE. Nonsense, nonsense! Don't you see what a good turn we've done for the poor boy? If she's a flirt you wouldn't want him to marry her, would you?

IRENE. No—but—you don't really think she's a flirt, do you?

UNCLE. It looks like it.

IRENE. That dowdy little thing a flirt?

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

UNCLE. Dowdy?

IRENE [*Rising*]. Why, her gowns are frights, and her hats—— [*With a gesture she indicates the futility of mere words to describe those hats.*]

UNCLE. Well, hats or no hats, I don't see how you can deny that she's a flirt. Here she is engaged to your husband——

IRENE. Oh, Uncle John!

UNCLE. And carrying on desperately with his own brother-in-law.

IRENE. But, Uncle John, are you sure you're not mistaken? Are you sure?

Enter NORA from hall.

Well, Nora, what is it?

NORA. The ostypath.

UNCLE. The what?

IRENE. The osteopath, she means. I'll come at once. [*Goes toward door.*] [*Exit Nora.*]

UNCLE. Osteopath, eh? Where did you get him?

IRENE. It isn't a him—it's a her.

UNCLE. Well, her?

IRENE. Mrs. Jenks recommended her to me. She's a great invalid, you know.

UNCLE. And does osteopathy benefit her?

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

IRENE. Oh, no, she's worse than ever. [*Going.*]

UNCLE. Irene—— [*She stops.*] Do you think it's quite fair to Miss Ladew?

IRENE. What do you mean?

UNCLE. For you to go on with all your medicines and treatments?

IRENE. I don't think I understand you.

UNCLE. Suppose that some one of these various remedial agents that you employ should benefit you?

IRENE. Well?

UNCLE. Suppose they were to cure you? Suppose you should not die? Nice fix Miss Ladew would be in.

IRENE. I never thought of that.

UNCLE. You've made a contract with her. It's up to you to deliver the goods.

IRENE. Then you think——

UNCLE. I think that as a woman of honor you ought to throw away your powders and your medicines, discharge your staff of doctors, bounce them all bag and baggage.

IRENE [*Faintly*]. Oh, Uncle John——

UNCLE. It's only common honesty.

IRENE. But, Uncle John, I—I—didn't really promise to die, did I?

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

UNCLE. My dear girl, I'm surprised—yes—and pained. These quibbles are unworthy of you.

IRENE. But I only said "if."

UNCLE. You know perfectly well that it was quite understood.

IRENE [*Almost in tears, finally makes up her mind to a great renunciation, and sits on settee*]. V-v-very well.

Enter NORA from the hall.

NORA. The ostypath——

IRENE. You may dismiss the osteopath and say to her that I shall not require her services in future.

NORA. Excuse me, ma'am, but she's already gone.

IRENE. What?

NORA. Yes, ma'am. She seemed displeased at being kept waiting, and she said I was to tell you that she would not return.

IRENE. Oh, very well; you may go, Nora.

NORA. And if you please, ma'am, she left her bill. [*Proffers IRENE the bill.*]

IRENE. Put it on my desk.

NORA. Yes, ma'am. [*Lays bill on desk at R. and goes out into the hall.*]

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

IRENE [*Rising*]. The insolence!

UNCLE. There, so that's over and, whatever happens, you will at least have the satisfaction of knowing that you leave Stuart provided for.

IRENE. Yes—yes. [*Tearfully.*] Emily's just the one I wanted. She'll be good to him, she's kind and thoughtful, and—and——

UNCLE. And dowdy.

IRENE. Oh, of course, Stuart could never care for anybody but me.

UNCLE. Especially for such a colorless little thing as Miss Ladew, eh?

[*Voices of STUART and MISS LADEW are heard off rear.*]

Hello, isn't that Stuart's voice?

IRENE. Yes, yes, it's he.

[*Hurries up to door into the hall and meets STUART, who is showing MISS LADEW in. MISS LADEW is dressed in the extreme height of fashion, in direct contrast in every way with her appearance in Act I; her manner is gay and animated; she comes down to UNCLE J., who is in front of settee; STUART remains up by door embracing IRENE, who does not at first take MISS LADEW in at all.*]

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

STUART. Hello, little woman, how have you been, eh? Have you been a good girl while I was away?

MISS LADEW [*To* UNCLE J.]. Well, sir, how do you like me this afternoon?

UNCLE. When last I saw you, you made a remark about old maids——

[*STUART and IRENE are coming down.*]

MISS LADEW. Well, I've changed my mind.

[*IRENE sees EMILY and is clearly shocked.*]

UNCLE. So I observe.

STUART. Wasn't it jolly, Uncle John? When I got off the train whom should I see but Miss Ladew?

MISS LADEW. Yes, I happened to be driving by.

IRENE [*Sardonically*]. Really?

MISS LADEW. Yes. Wasn't it odd?

IRENE. Very.

STUART. And the lady was kind enough to drive me over, so here I am. [*Goes to* UNCLE J.] Well, Uncle John, what's been going on in my absence?

MISS LADEW [*Goes to* STUART]. Oh, we've been very gay without you. By the by, I have a bone to pick with you.

STUART. Oh, yes, I know. I ran away after having invited you to all sorts of sprees. But you got my letter, of course?

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

IRENE [*Gasps guiltily*]. Letter?

MISS LADEW. I did not.

STUART. You didn't! [MISS L. *turns, looks at* IRENE.] Why, I left a note explaining that I had suddenly been summoned to the city on imperative business.

MISS LADEW. Strange!

STUART. Irene, you sent it to Miss Ladew, didn't you?

IRENE. Of course.

MISS L. I didn't get it. I had begun to think you faithless, like all the rest.

STUART. Ha, ha! No wonder—why, to be sure. But I assure you I am less fickle than the polar star.

[MISS L. and STUART *cross L. chatting together.*]

UNCLE [*Aside to* IRENE]. You didn't send the note, I suppose?

IRENE [*Between her teeth*]. *She happened to be driving by.*

UNCLE. I suppose you didn't send the note?

[IRENE *shakes her head guiltily.*]

Why not?

IRENE. I—I—I don't know.

UNCLE. Don't you see you are doing everything

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

you can to upset your own plans? You want her to like Stuart, don't you?

IRENE. Well, I *did*!

UNCLE. Then why do a thing calculated to cause misunderstanding? Don't you know that love is a sensitive blossom; that the slightest roughness will rub away its fragile, delicate bloom?

IRENE [*Irritably*]. Who said anything about love?

[MISS L. and STUART burst into laughter.]

MISS LADEW. No, really, you are quite too absurd. Upon my word, you are.

STUART. But I mean every word of it. Really I do. [*They stroll up to the window.*]

IRENE. She *happened* to be driving—— Uncle John, that woman is a viper!

UNCLE. My dear!

IRENE. A viper, a viper, I tell you!

UNCLE. Why, I think she's charming.

IRENE. Of course she is. [*Getting more angry every moment.*] That's exactly what I mean. She's a viper. I took her into my bosom and now she's turned and stung me. Look at them!

[MISS L. is gazing coquettishly into STUART'S eyes and he is looking laughingly into her hers.]

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

UNCLE. Well!

IRENE. Why, she's not the same woman at all.

UNCLE. Well, she *is* a bit improved.

IRENE. Improved? Why, she's positively fascinating. If I had known, do you think I—why it's—it's—monstrous!

[MISS L. and STUART stroll out through the windows and exit L. laughing and chatting.]

There they go! [Following to the French window.] Look at them—before my very eyes, and on my birthday, too. You see he's forgotten.

UNCLE. She isn't exactly dowdy, is she?

IRENE. Dowdy, dowdy? Why—she—she's a viper, I tell you, a viper!

UNCLE. My poor Irene!

IRENE. She's clever. Yes, she's clever, but she's made one mistake. She showed me that she's clever and it's not yet too late.

UNCLE. Why, my dear girl!

IRENE. You think I'd let that woman marry my husband?

UNCLE. Eh?

IRENE. I guess not!

UNCLE. But I thought——

IRENE. But don't you see I didn't know?

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

UNCLE. What, that she was attractive?

IRENE. Oh, it isn't that, it isn't that, it's the deceit—the underhandedness of the creature. She came to me looking like a heartbroken little sparrow. I took her in——

UNCLE J. And she took you in?

IRENE. And pitied her and now she turns out a regular bird of paradise.

UNCLE. First she was a viper and now she's a bird.

IRENE. Well, so she is. But viper—or—or——

UNCLE. Or bird——

IRENE. Or bird—she shall never, never marry my husband! *[Goes to settee and sits determinedly.]*

UNCLE. I don't see how you're going to prevent it.

IRENE. You'll see.

UNCLE. Besides, it's all arranged. You persuaded her against her own better judgment.

IRENE *[Rises]*. Don't remind me of it.

UNCLE. And you just turned Richard against her.

IRENE. I?—You know very well it was you who did it.

UNCLE. I like that. When I told him she was engaged you said, “Oh, yes, Richard, she told me so

herself." And when he asked if it was some one he knew, didn't you say, "Yes, I believe so, isn't he, Uncle John?"

IRENE. *She happened to be driving by!* Yes, yes, yes, to be sure. Uncle John, you're not really set upon this—this thing, are you?

UNCLE. What thing, my dear?

IRENE. You wouldn't mind if this—this arrangement I made with Emily were broken off?

UNCLE. Why, my dear girl!

IRENE. There, there. You wouldn't, would you?

UNCLE. My dear Irene, it's impossible for a stupid old fellow like me to keep pace with the marvellous mutations of your brain.

IRENE. I've thought of something. Of course you'll stay here to tea?

UNCLE. I had that intention.

IRENE. That's good, that's good. And I'll ask—that creature—yes, I will—but—but there's Stuart.

UNCLE. What about Stuart? Of course he'll be here, too.

IRENE. That's the trouble. I don't want him here.

UNCLE. Eh?

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

IRENE. No. Can't you—can't you think of some way to get him away?

UNCLE. I could take him to the club.

IRENE. Oh, but I want you, I need you.

UNCLE [*Mockingly*]. I'll use a little diplomacy. I'll just say to him, "Now, Stuart, my boy, your wife, Miss Ladew, and I are going to take tea here, but you're not. You're going over to the club."

IRENE. Yes, that will do.

Enter STUART and MISS LADEW through the French windows.

STUART [*To MISS L.*] It's a fact, I assure you. I have never seen such a sight. There they were hand in hand, eyes in eyes, soul reading soul, and never had an idea——

UNCLE. Stuart!

STUART [*Suddenly observes UNCLE J. and IRENE*]. Ah, my dear, there you are. I was just telling Miss Ladew—— [*Suddenly looks at his watch.*] By Jove, I'm awfully sorry, but I've got to run along. Charlie Johnson of the Larchmont Regatta Committee is here; you know him—dear old Charlie. I've got to show him some of the sights. You won't mind, will you?

IRENE. Oh, no, not in the least, if dear Emily will stay with us.

STUART. You will, won't you, Miss Ladew, as a favor to me—to us? You can't think how bored I am to have to leave you.

MISS LADEW. Try to bear up under your affliction, won't you?

UNCLE. Stuart is a brave lad.

STUART. I'll do the best I can, and don't forget you're going to the races with us. [*Goes to IRENE.*] My dear, she's splendid; it's no trouble at all to be nice to her. Au revoir, everybody. [*As he goes out into the hall he encounters DICK, almost bumping into him.*] I beg your pardon, Dick! [*DICK glares at him without speaking.*]

UNCLE. Ah, Richard!

MISS LADEW. Good afternoon, Dick.

IRENE. Excuse me, everybody. I must go and see about tea. [*She goes out into the hall, remarking:* She happened to be driving——

MISS LADEW [*To RICHARD*]. You don't seem to be very gay this afternoon. Too long at the club last night, eh? Ah, sir, those who dance at night must pay the fiddler in the morning.

UNCLE. It's the way of the world.

RICHARD. Nothing of the sort, I assure you.

MISS LADEW. Didn't the little ball fall right for you?

RICHARD [*Shortly*]. I didn't play.

UNCLE [*Embarrassed*]. Er—I think I see a man I know! [*He escapes through the French window.*]

MISS LADEW [*Sitting down on the settee*]. Well, Dick, come and tell me all about it.

RICHARD. About what, if you please?

MISS LADEW. Whatever it is. Something troubles you. Come and sob your woes out on Mother's—that is to say—come and tell me.

[RICHARD *gives a gesture of impatience.*]
Better; you've no idea how relieved you'd feel.

RICHARD [*Goes to R. end of settee*]. You really want to know?

MISS LADEW. Oh, leave me out of it. It's your happiness I'm thinking of.

RICHARD. Are you, I wonder? [*Sits R. of her.*]

MISS LADEW. My dear Dick!

RICHARD. The fact is—I beg your pardon——

MISS LADEW. Eh? [*Puts her left hand on RICHARD'S arm; he looks at it closely.*]

RICHARD. You wear no ring?

MISS LADEW. No. I took it off in Geneva.

RICHARD. Geneva? [*Taking her hand.*] Ah, yes, Geneva. [*Drops her hand suddenly.*] I wish to God I'd never seen you!

MISS LADEW. What an uncomplimentary speech!

RICHARD. Yes, yes, I dare say!

MISS LADEW. My dear Dick, whatever is the matter with you?

RICHARD. The matter is—that I love you—love you with all my heart, and—and——

MISS LADEW. Well, that needn't make you rude, need it? [*Putting her hand on his arm.*]

RICHARD [*Roughly*]. Where's your ring?

MISS LADEW. I told you I took it off in Geneva.

RICHARD. Not that—not my ring. The other ring—*his* ring.

MISS LADEW. His ring—whose ring?

RICHARD. Oh, I don't know his name. They wouldn't tell me.

MISS LADEW [*Rising, beginning to comprehend*]. Oh, so they told you I was engaged.

RICHARD [*Rising*]. Are you or are you not?

MISS LADEW. Well, in a sort of way I—I suppose I am.

RICHARD. In a sort of way! Good heavens, don't you know?

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

MISS LADEW. Well—yes, I suppose I am.

RICHARD. Why didn't you tell me?

MISS LADEW. Well, you see, it was supposed to be a secret. Only three persons knew of it—your uncle, Irene, and I.

RICHARD. And the man——

MISS LADEW. Oh, dear me, no, he doesn't know.

RICHARD [*With a roar of amazement*]. What?

MISS LADEW. Ah, no, that would never do at all.

RICHARD [*Gasping*]. What on earth do you mean?

MISS LADEW. Well, there were reasons why we—why I couldn't take him into my confidence at present.

RICHARD. Reasons? Good Lord!

MISS LADEW. You see the circumstances were rather unusual—a trifle unconventional, in fact.

RICHARD. Unconventional? Good grief!

MISS LADEW. Why, my dear Dick, how demonstrative you are!

RICHARD [*Approaches her and gazes anxiously at her as if a new idea had struck him*]. My dear Emily, are you quite well?

MISS LADEW. I never felt better. And only yesterday you assured me that I never looked better.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

I hope you haven't changed your mind. [*She sits at the piano and drums gently.*]

RICHARD. I think I am losing it.

MISS LADEW. Well, there is certainly some external evidence in favor of that theory.

RICHARD. Did I understand you correctly? You say you are engaged—[*she nods*—]and your fiancé doesn't know it.

MISS LADEW. Quite correct, my dear Dick.

RICHARD. There is one more question I'd like to ask.

MISS LADEW. Speak up, Dickie dear——

RICHARD. Will he know it when he marries you?

[*She laughs delightedly; DICK rushes blindly out at the French windows, narrowly missing*

UNCLE JOHN *as he comes in.*]

UNCLE. My dear Miss Ladew, what have you been doing to our poor Richard?

MISS LADEW. Ha, ha, ha! He did seem a trifle upset, didn't he?

UNCLE. If I hadn't dodged just when I did, I'd been upset, I can tell you. What the mischief happened?

MISS LADEW. I was merely confirming a report that had come to his ears.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

UNCLE. Ha! He told you, then, the scoundrel!

MISS LADEW. Did you really think he wouldn't?

UNCLE. Why, he promised us——

MISS LADEW. Ha!

Enter IRENE from the hall, followed by NORA with tray of tea-things.

IRENE. Place it here, Nora.

[The three sit about the table, IRENE behind it, the others R. and L.]

[To MISS LADEW.] It was so sweet of you to stay. Will you have sugar?

MISS LADEW. One lump, please.

IRENE. Cream or lemon?

MISS LADEW. Lemon.

IRENE *[To UNCLE J. significantly]*. Lemon! Will you have cream?

UNCLE. Yes, please. *[They sip their tea.]*

IRENE *[To MISS LADEW]*. We haven't seen much of you since Stuart went away.

MISS LADEW. No. The fact is, I have been rather busy.

UNCLE. Quite so. *[To IRENE.]* Didn't I tell you, my dear, that she has been busy?

IRENE. Yes. He said you had been *busy*!

UNCLE. I thought that must be the reason.

MISS LADEW. Precisely. But of course I thought you must be wanting to see me about that little matter of my engagement to your husband.

IRENE. Why—yes.

MISS LADEW. So I dropped in to reassure you—

IRENE [*Faintly*]. To reassure me?

MISS LADEW. Yes. Just to let you know it's all right.

IRENE. All right?

MISS LADEW [*Cheerfully*]. To be sure. Don't be downhearted, my dear friend, I will marry your husband.

UNCLE. Noble girl!

MISS LADEW. Not at all. I'm beginning to think it might not be so bad after all.

IRENE [*Recovering herself and gathering her wits for the onslaught*]. It's awfully, awfully kind of you, I'm sure, my dear Emily.

MISS LADEW. Oh, not in the least. Now that I've seen Stuart again I'm sure it will be quite easy.

IRENE [*Wincing*]. Oh, but it is—it is kind of you, all the same. Still, I've been thinking since I saw you that perhaps I've been a little selfish about it.

MISS LADEW. Oh, not at all, my dear.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

IRENE. It's most sweet of you to say so, but—but I'm afraid I have. I begin to fear that it was a great liberty on my part. I was so anxious for Stuart's happiness that I'm afraid I didn't think enough of yours.

MISS LADEW. What do you mean?

IRENE. Well, the truth is, Stuart is sometimes very trying, isn't he, Uncle John?

UNCLE. Most men are trying—and few succeeding.

IRENE. You see, dear—— [*Pronouncing the word as if she were delivering a stab between the fifth and sixth ribs.*] I think it will only be fair to you to let you know the worst about him.

MISS LADEW [*Cheerfully*]. All right. What is it?

IRENE. He—he has a temper.

MISS LADEW. I wouldn't give a Christmas card for a man who hasn't.

IRENE. No, to be sure, quite so, indeed. But Stuart is, to say the least, impulsive—sometimes violent, now and then extremely violent.

MISS LADEW. Good! Good! Lord, how I hate a milksop!

IRENE [*Wincing, but nerving herself to her task*]. You'll understand, my dear Emily, how painful it is

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

for me to say these things to you about Stuart, but I feel you are entitled to know the truth. The truth is that sometimes the slightest trifle will drive him perfectly wild.

[UNCLE JOHN *getting amazed, she subdues him with a look.*]

One morning at breakfast I put too much cream in his coffee, and what do you think he did?

MISS LADEW. I don't know. Swore, maybe.

IRENE. [*Solemnly*]. He threw it at me!

MISS LADEW [*Sees UNCLE JOHN'S look of mingled comprehension and puzzlement, comprehends IRENE'S scheme at a glance, chokes a laugh in her napkin*].

Dear me! And what did you do?

IRENE. I burst into tears and left the room!

MISS LADEW. That was a mistake. I should have replied with the sugar bowl. You'll see how I will manage him; that is, of course *you* won't see, but Mr. Belden will, I hope.

IRENE. Oh—h—h—h——

MISS LADEW. You'll come and visit us often, won't you, dear Mr. Belden?

UNCLE [*Genially*]. Charmed, I'm sure.

MISS LADEW. May I call you "Uncle"? It will only be anticipating a little.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

IRENE. But I haven't told you all.

MISS LADEW. No?

IRENE. No. That's not the worst, not by any means. He poisoned Choco, my poor little angel of a French poodle.

MISS LADEW. Poisoned your dog!

IRENE. Because the little fellow barked and kept him awake.

UNCLE. Why, Irene, I thought you wrote me that a trolley car killed Choco.

IRENE [*Irritably*]. So I did, I did. I couldn't let any one suspect the truth, could I?

UNCLE. But you're telling about it now.

MISS LADEW. Out of a stern sense of duty to me. Don't you see, Mr. Belden?

UNCLE. Of course. What an ass I am!

MISS LADEW. Yes.

UNCLE. I beg your pardon!

MISS LADEW. What did you do when he poisoned the dog?

IRENE. Do? Oh—why, I cried all night.

MISS LADEW. She cried all night. Do you hear that, Mr. Belden? Dear, dear, dear, my poor girl! Cried all night! You know what you should have done? You should have sent for your maid, packed

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

all your trunks, put on your prettiest frock and hat, and announced your intention of walking out of the house, never, never, never to return.

IRENE. But suppose he let me go?

MISS LADEW. But he wouldn't, if he really loved you. I am assuming, of course, that he does love you.

IRENE [*Indignantly*]. The idea! Love me? I should think he does. Love me, indeed!

UNCLE. Love me, love my dog.

MISS LADEW. Very well, then, and when you had thus brought him to his senses you should have insisted upon his buying you the most expensive French poodle to be had for money, a winner at all the big bench shows, a champion of champions,—nothing less.

IRENE. Well, it's too late now.

MISS LADEW. Well, anything else?

IRENE. Yes, and worse.

MISS LADEW. Really!

IRENE [*Launching her final thunderbolt*]. He—he drinks!
[*They all rise.*]

MISS LADEW. Drinks!

IRENE. Horribly!

MISS LADEW [*Indignantly, to UNCLE JOHN*]. Mr.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

Belden, you knew of this. Why have you concealed it from me?

UNCLE. But, my dear young lady——

MISS LADEW. You would have wed me to a dipsomaniac?

UNCLE. I assure you I never saw him drunk in my life.

IRENE [*Much cheered, despite these disgraceful revelations*]. Ah, that's just his underhand way, and when he drinks he gets positively beside himself; why, on several occasions he has actually beaten me!

UNCLE. What?

IRENE. It's the truth. [*Joyously.*] You've no idea how it hurts me to have to tell you this, but it's only fair to you. Only the other night he came home in a disgraceful state, and when I spoke to him about it—he—he—well—just you look at that! [*Triumphantly shows MISS L. the black and blue mark on her wrist.*]

UNCLE. Well, I'll be——

MISS LADEW. And you endured it without complaint, I suppose?

IRENE. My dear, how could a wife tell such a thing of her husband?

MISS LADEW. You're an angel—positively an

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

angel—too much of an angel altogether for a man like that. Well, is there anything more?

IRENE. No—no, nothing more. That is, only more of the same sort of brutality. So, now, my dear, you know it all. Of course, after this, I could not expect to hold you to your promise. No woman could. I'm sorry, but it can't be helped, so I release you from your promise.

MISS LADEW. Nonsense! Don't be so down-hearted. What that man needs is a strong hand—kind, yes, but firm, firm. You shall be revenged, I promise you. I'll tame the wretch; yes, I'll tame him!

IRENE [*Faintly*]. Thank you, dearest, but I really couldn't expect it of you.

MISS LADEW. Marry him? I should think I would. Why, it makes him positively fascinating. [*Sees STUART'S photo on piano and picks it up.*]

IRENE. Oh—oh!

MISS LADEW [*Looking at photograph*]. He doesn't seem to have such a brutal face, after all. It only goes to show you never can tell. Ah, these men, these men. [*Lays down photograph. Goes to IRENE.*] You poor abused girl, make yourself quite easy. I will be your avenger.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

IRENE [*Miserably*]. Th-th-thank you, d-d-darling. [*She turns to* UNCLE JOHN *for comfort; enter* RICHARD *from French window.*]

MISS LADEW [*Suddenly*]. Richard Benden, do you know what's been going on here?

RICHARD. Eh?

IRENE [*Panic-stricken*]. Oh, Emily, I beg of you, not a word; I——

MISS LADEW. Silence! I won't stand by and see you abused. [*To* RICHARD.] Do you know that your brother-in-law is a brute?

RICHARD. Stuart a brute?

MISS LADEW. Is it possible that you have been living under the same roof with your sister and didn't know it?

IRENE. Oh, I beg of you——

RICHARD. What the deuce do you mean?

MISS LADEW. I mean that your brother-in-law is a wife-beater.

RICHARD. Nonsense!

MISS LADEW. It's a fact. Your poor sister has just told us.

RICHARD. Irene, is this true?

MISS LADEW [*To* IRENE]. No, you shall not shield the monster. [*Goes to* IRENE, *takes her hand,*

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

shows RICHARD the bruise on the wrist.] Do you see this mark? Ask your poor sister who did it?

RICHARD. Irene, my poor sister, who did it?

IRENE. Oh, Uncle John! [*Buries her head on his shoulder.*]

UNCLE. You see, Richard, there is a sort of misunderstanding about it. In a way he did it, and in a way he didn't. You see Irene was standing in the doorway when Stuart, not knowing she was there—

MISS LADEW. You mean well, Mr. Belden, but I really can't stand by and witness this injustice. Mrs. Randolph has just told us in plain terms that her husband came home drunk and beat her.

RICHARD. Irene!

IRENE [*The picture of helpless misery*]. You heard what—Uncle John said.

RICHARD. I see. My poor little girl! The brute, the brute——

STUART [*Heard outside*]. All right, Nora, let me know when he comes.

Enter STUART from the hall.

Well, I got rid of my man as soon as I could.
[IRENE turns from him to UNCLE J.]

RICHARD. Scoundrel!

STUART. Eh?

RICHARD. Cad!!

STUART. What?

RICHARD. Brute!!!

[*Rushes at STUART; UNCLE J. stops him.*]

UNCLE. For heaven's sake, Richard——

RICHARD. How dare you protect him!

STUART [*Amazed*]. What in the name——

RICHARD. Don't try to deceive me, I've been hoodwinked long enough. Oh, don't be afraid, you're safe enough here, but we shall meet again, and when we do, look out for yourself, you beater of women.

[*He rushes angrily out. STUART gazes blankly around at the others.*]

STUART. Poor Dick, what the dickens ails him? Has he gone mad? Irene, dear, tell me, what it all means.

[*IRENE embraces him, then tears herself from his arms and rushes out of door L. 1 E, closing and locking it behind her. STUART rushes into UNCLE J.'s arms, he throws UNCLE J. on settee and rushes to door, tries to open it, shakes it, finds it locked.*]

STUART. Irene, I say Irene. [*There's no answer.*] See here, Uncle John, what the devil does all this mean?

UNCLE. Fie! Fie! Ladies present, Stuart, ladies present.

STUART. Ladies be hanged—— [*To Miss LADEW.*] meaning no disrespect to you, of course. Will you tell me what this is all about, sir?

UNCLE. I—I really think I——

MISS LADEW. If I were in your place, Mr. Belden, I should think very carefully before speaking.

UNCLE. Yes, yes—I think that would be better, I must think. Now, if you could give me a day or two to think.

STUART. Day or two to think? Are you out of your mind? Day or two nothing! Can't you tell me in plain English what this devil's nonsense is all about?

MISS LADEW [*To UNCLE J.*]. He *has* got a temper.

STUART. Got a temper, who wouldn't have a temper? [*To Miss L., L. of table.*] Just wait until you're accused of beating your wife.

MISS LADEW. Haven't got a wife——

STUART. Well, your husband, then.

MISS LADEW. Haven't got a husband.

STUART. Well, then your fiancé, if you've got one. Temper, is it, why not? Here's a happy husband comes gayly home, his brother-in-law calls

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

him a scoundrel, assaults him, and gallops away. His wife bursts into tears and locks the door on him, and his wife's uncle and friend decline to give any information. [*Rushes to door, tries to open it.*] Irene, Irene, dear!

[*No answer: angrily kicks door; injures his foot, grabs it in his hand, hops on one leg to L. of table, saying*]:

Oh, oh, oh! Look here now, you've got to straighten this out. Uncle John, I appeal to you, what the devil is it all about?

UNCLE. Am I to understand that you deny beating your wife?

STUART. Beating my wife? Good God, yes, of course, I deny it.

MISS LADEW. Naturally, he would.

UNCLE. Yes, naturally.

STUART. See here, sir. Perhaps you will at least be good enough to tell an inquiring husband whether you ever saw him beat his wife?

UNCLE. I—er—I decline to answer.

STUART. What? [*Collapses in chair L. of table.*]

UNCLE. I won't even say that I did not see you beat her.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

STUART. Oh! Oh! Oh! Good Lord, he won't say even that. Good Lord! See here. Perhaps you will be willing to go as far as to say whether you told Dick that I beat her?

[*Rushes at* UNCLE J. UNCLE J. *hastily swings around to R. of* MISS LADEW.]

UNCLE. Well, yes, I think I may strain a point and tell you that I did not tell him that.

STUART. Very good of you, I am sure. [*To* MISS L. *sharply.*] Did you tell him?

MISS LADEW. I—er—I told him that somebody told me that you beat her.

STUART. Who told you?

MISS LADEW. Who told me?

STUART. Can't you hear me? Yes, I said who told you?

MISS LADEW. The—er—the same person who told — Mr. Belden.

STUART [*To* UNCLE J.]. And who, if you please, told you?

UNCLE. Why—er—I—I can't seem to remember.

STUART. Can't remember? Do you think I'm a fool?

UNCLE J. Oh, yes—now I remember.

STUART. I should think so.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

UNCLE. I—it was the same person who told—Miss Ladew.

STUART. Oh, Lord!

UNCLE. I suppose you don't remember throwing a cup of coffee at her?

STUART. What?

MISS LADEW. Because she put too much cream in it.

STUART. Ridiculous!

UNCLE. And I suppose you don't remember poisoning poor little Choco either?

STUART. Nonsense, the dog was killed by a trolley car.

MISS LADEW. Ah, that's what you made her say.

STUART. See here, you're crazy.

UNCLE. And she did it to save her pride.

STUART. Oh, this is some horrible nightmare.

UNCLE [*Affected almost to tears*]. Poor Irene!

[MISS LADEW crosses to him, they weep in each other's arms.]

STUART [*In great exasperation*]. You know, I think I should be justified in spanking the pair of you.

MISS LADEW. Sir!

UNCLE. Dear me!

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

STUART. Curse me if I haven't half a notion to do it.

UNCLE. I scarcely think it would be advisable.

STUART. It would be nothing more than you deserve.

MISS LADEW. You can't spank me. I'm not your wife yet.

STUART. No, thank God.

[Returns to IRENE'S door; tries to open it.]

UNCLE [To MISS L.]. Do you want to be spanked?

MISS LADEW. No—o—o—o—o!

UNCLE. Then scoot.

[MISS L. rushes out through French window.

STUART gets chair from L. of table, slams it down in front of IRENE'S door, sits in it.]

STUART. Irene, here I am and here I stay till you come out!

IRENE [Moaning faintly in her room]. Oh—h—h—h !

UNCLE [Slamming down another chair and sitting in it]. Don't be afraid of him, Irene, I'm here, too.

STUART [In supreme disgust]. Bah!

Quick Curtain

ACT III

ACT III

TIME: Seven o'clock the same evening.

DISCOVERED: *At rise, UNCLE J. and STUART are discovered just where they were at the curtain of Act II.*

UNCLE J. *looks cool and comfortable and lies back in his chair pleasantly smoking a long cigar. STUART buries his face in his hands, cuckoo clock strikes seven. STUART rises, throws a book at clock and says, "Oh, shut up!" then comes back to IRENE'S door and speaks.*

STUART. Irene—Irene dear, please let me in.
[No answer.] Irene, my darling, I must see you. There's some terrible mistake. Can't you see I'm nearly crazy over it? Do let me in!

IRENE [*Miserably*]. Oh, please, please go away.

UNCLE. [*To STUART*]. Yes, for heaven's sake go away!

STUART [*To IRENE with a glare at UNCLE*]. But good heavens, how can I go away with everything in

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

this horrible mess? Let me in, dear, I must speak with you.

[*No answer. He faces about, in despair.*]

STUART. Oh, you!

UNCLE. It's going to be a pleasant evening.

STUART. Ha!

UNCLE. We could be very comfortable here, if we could only arrange about meals.

STUART. Meals!

[*Goes through French windows and stands outside. Enter NORA from the hall. She is crossing to L.*]

UNCLE. Nora!

NORA. Yes, sir.

UNCLE. I have thirst. I should like a highball. I think the makings are over there somewhere. [*Pointing.*]

NORA. Yes, sir.

[*Brings tray with glasses, decanter, siphon, etc., from console table L.U., puts them on table L.C.*]

UNCLE [*Rises, mixing himself a highball*]. Will you join me, Stuart?

STUART. I will not.

UNCLE. Ah, no more rum for you. Well, after all that's happened, it's just as well.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

NORA. If you please, sir, dinner is served.

[Goes out.]

UNCLE. Dinner, eh?

[STUART comes in again and goes to UNCLE J.]

STUART. See here, how much longer are you going to keep up this tomfoolery?

UNCLE. I don't know. How much longer are you?

STUART. Bah!

[Turns away in disgust, when enter RICHARD at rear. He is perfectly quiet and self-controlled, but wears a determined air.]

STUART. Thank heaven, here's some one I can meet on even terms. Two words with you, sir. You are my wife's brother. I have the honor to demand——

RICHARD *[Interrupting]*. One moment! Before anything is said that will make matters still worse, I desire to state my position. When last I saw you, I made a threat.

STUART. You did, sir.

RICHARD. I desire to withdraw it for the present.

STUART. I should think so.

RICHARD. There has been enough violence in this household.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

STUART. Sir——

RICHARD. Whatever you may have done——

STUART. But, good gad! I haven't done a damned thing!

RICHARD. Whatever you may have done, I say, it cannot be corrected by further violence on my part. It only remains to determine what's to be done next.

STUART [*Ironically*]. May I inquire how you propose to dispose of my affairs?

RICHARD. I propose to assist my sister in the disposition of *her* affairs. To do that it is necessary for me to see her.

STUART. I ask nothing better. I've been trying to see her for one whole accursed hour.

RICHARD. And, of course, she won't see you?

STUART. Damn it! No!

RICHARD. Under the circumstances do you think it strange?

STUART [*Turning away*]. Oh, I shall go mad!

UNCLE. Stuart, I think, under the circumstances, you had better leave us.

STUART. No, sir! I decline to leave this room until I know from her own lips the details of the charge made against me.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

UNCLE. But, my dear fellow, you say yourself that she won't even see you. Come, be reasonable. Make some allowance for her state of mind.

STUART. Allowance be damned! Is anybody making any allowance for my state of mind, I should like to know?

UNCLE. Come, come, run along, like a good fellow. Give me a chance to use my—er—good offices. How the devil can I do anything with you two chaps glaring at each other like a couple of bull terriers in a ring?

STUART. What do you mean?

UNCLE. Hsh! Give me a chance!

STUART. But, you said——

UNCLE. I know! I know I did, but you won't hold an old man to account for every little word.

STUART. Then you don't believe I'm such a brute?

UNCLE. Well, possibly not an unmitigated brute!

RICHARD [*Impatiently*]. Well, are you going to allow me to see my sister, or are you not?

STUART [*Going close to him and almost spitting the words in his face*]. Yes! But not at your request, sir!

RICHARD. It is perfectly immaterial to me at

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

whose request you do it, so long as you *do* do it.
[*They glare at each other a moment.*]

STUART. Well, I'm going, but I'll have you know that I'll make somebody sweat for this before I'm done!

[*He goes out angrily into the hall. RICHARD then goes up to IRENE'S door and knocks.*]

RICHARD. Irene, Irene, it's I. It's Dickie. I want to see you.

IRENE. Oh, dear, I can't come out. I don't want to see anybody.

RICHARD. But you must! It's most important.

IRENE. Is Stuart there?

RICHARD. No. He's just gone.

IRENE. Oh, dear. All right, I'll come in a moment.

RICHARD [*Turning to* UNCLE J.]. Now, sir, how much do you know about this affair?

UNCLE [*Uncomfortably*]. Well—er—not very much.

RICHARD. No wonder poor little Sis was depressed and out of sorts. How long do you suppose this hellish business has been going on, anyhow?

UNCLE. You'll have to ask her that.

RICHARD. I mean to. How long have you known about it?

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

UNCLE. About an hour and a half.

RICHARD. So she told you, eh?

UNCLE. Well, not precisely. She told Miss Ladew when I was present.

RICHARD. Hm! It seems everybody knew about it but me. I suppose you'd all have let me go on in ignorance of it, if it hadn't been for Miss Ladew.

UNCLE. Well, candidly, I don't think it was exactly wise to tell you. If you hadn't made such a row we could probably have patched it up somehow.

RICHARD. Humph! The only thing that'll be patched up is Stuart, and it'll take a surgeon to do that.

UNCLE. You mean?

RICHARD. Never mind what I mean.

UNCLE. Um—er—well—er—I wouldn't be hasty, if I were you.

RICHARD. Hasty! Humph!

UNCLE. Well, I wouldn't. Maybe we can straighten it out. Maybe things aren't so bad after all.

RICHARD. Do you dare sit there and defend that scoundrel?

UNCLE. No—o—not precisely—but perhaps he isn't so black as he's painted.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

RICHARD. What the deuce are you driving at?

UNCLE. Well, what I mean is——

[*Enter IRENE. RICHARD goes to her. Her eyes are red from weeping and she does not dare look anybody in the face.*]

RICHARD [*About to comfort her*]. My poor little Sis!

IRENE. Oh, please don't anybody pet me. I shall die if you do. Look at my eyes. I'm a perfect fright. Oh, I can't talk to you, really I can't—I can't—I can't.

RICHARD. Nonsense! You must—don't you see, you must. Something's got to be done.

UNCLE. Yes, tell him.

IRENE. Must I? Oh, well, if I must, I must.

[*Reluctantly she goes to the settee and sits beside*

RICHARD, UNCLE JOHN *at her other side.*]

RICHARD. Come now, Sis. Tell me all about it. When did this horrible business begin?

[*IRENE looks at him for a moment, opens her mouth to speak, chokes up, buries her face in her handkerchief, and begins to sob on RICHARD'S shoulder.*]

UNCLE [*Beginning to beat a cowardly retreat toward*

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

the French windows]. I think I'll have to be going. I've an appointment.

IRENE [*Pursuing him*]. Uncle John, if you dare, I'll never speak to you again!

[UNCLE JOHN *resigns himself to the inevitable and suffers himself to be led back.*]

RICHARD [*Rises. He is puzzled and beginning to be a trifle suspicious*]. Strikes me there's something fuzzy about all this. Can't you tell your own brother the truth? [IRENE *is still silent.*] Come, come, speak out. How long has this been going on, I say? [IRENE *tries to answer, but again takes refuge in tears on UNCLE JOHN'S shoulder.*] Well, then, you seem to know something about it. I'd like to hear from you, sir.

UNCLE. Er—um—er—— Really, you know I ought to keep that appointment.

IRENE [*Throws both arms about his neck*]. Uncle John!

UNCLE. Oh, very well. [*To IRENE*]: Do you want me to tell Dick *all* about it? [IRENE *nods.*] Well, then, here goes, and why in—well, why the—er—well, why I was ever fool enough to come east of Omaha, I'm hanged if I can tell.

RICHARD [*Impatiently*]. Well, well!

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

UNCLE. The truth is that Stuart is not precisely the ruffian that we have perhaps allowed you to think.

RICHARD. Perhaps! Ha!

UNCLE. Er—yes—as a matter of fact, it's just possible he never beat Irene at all.

RICHARD. What!

UNCLE [*Hedging a bit*]. Er—well, not more than once, at all events. You must make allowances for him. You see, as I understand it, he came home in a great hurry and possibly he had taken a cocktail or two and it had gone to his head and dinner was late and that irritated him. So he picked up a stick—a big stick—where is that stick?—and was flourishing it around and it may have been entirely an accident that he struck Irene a blow. So——

IRENE [*Who has been listening to this elaborate fairy tale with growing amazement now breaks in indignantly her tears all forgotten*]. Why, Uncle John, how can you?

UNCLE. Eh?

IRENE. You know perfectly well that Stuart never struck me in his life!

RICHARD. Well, I'll be——!

IRENE [*Getting angrier and angrier*]. The idea of

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

your standing there and telling such a terrible story right under my very nose, too!

UNCLE [*Throwing up his hands*]. Never again! Never again!

IRENE. When you know he's always been just the kindest, dearest, sweetest old thing that ever was in all this——

RICHARD [*To IRENE*]. Then, perhaps you'll be kind enough to tell me why *you've* been making these very same charges yourself?

IRENE [*Helplessly*]. Eh? What did you say?

RICHARD [*Getting more angry every moment*]. I say, then, perhaps you'll explain why you said these very same things about Stuart?

[*Glares at her. She feebly tries to answer but fails, and once more bursts into tears, turning to UNCLE JOHN and burying her face on his shoulder.*]

UNCLE [*Pets her a moment, then puts her aside and approaches the indignant Richard*]. Er—suppose we sit down.

RICHARD [*Shouting*]. I won't sit down! [*Does so, however.*]

UNCLE. Oh, very well. The fact is that poor old Stuart is as innocent as a baby.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

RICHARD. You say so now, eh?

UNCLE. Certainly!

RICHARD. Then possibly *you* can explain that cock-and-bull story *you* were telling just now.

IRENE [*Rising. To UNCLE JOHN indignantly*]. Yes, indeed.

UNCLE [*Affecting indignation*]. Cock-and-bull story, sir!

RICHARD. Yes, cock-and-bull story—cocktails, late for dinner, flourishing stick, and so on.

UNCLE. Oh—er—well—er—— [*Looking at his watch.*] Dear me! But I really ought to keep that appointment.

IRENE. Oh, please, Uncle John!

UNCLE. No—no—I wasn't really going. [*He is resigned to his fate.*]

RICHARD. Well, speak up, sir!

UNCLE. Irene, I really wish you would—— [*IRENE takes refuge in tears again.*] Oh, all right, all right, I'll attend to it. Well, then, this is how it happened. Irene had cause to think that a certain young woman was paying too much attention to Stuart. Am I right, Irene? [*IRENE nods.*] Naturally, she didn't wish to say anything to Stuart about it.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

RICHARD. Why not?

UNCLE. Oh, my dear boy, think of the blow to her pride. Well, it occurred to her that one way to discourage the young woman would be to give Stuart a black eye ——

IRENE. Oh, Uncle John!

RICHARD. Eh?

UNCLE. In the young woman's estimation. This plan she followed.

RICHARD. Well, of all the——

UNCLE. Mark you, I don't say that it was precisely a stroke of genius. But, at any rate, that was what occurred.

RICHARD. Well, I'll be——

IRENE [*Threatening tears again*]. Oh, Dick, please—please! I just can't stand it! I can't—I can't!

UNCLE. So now it's all perfectly clear, isn't it?

IRENE. Yes, perfectly.

RICHARD. Yes, I suppose so, but—— [*Struck by an idea*]. What the mischief did she tell Miss Ladew about it? That's what caused all the row.

[UNCLE JOHN and IRENE exchange looks of dismay.]

UNCLE [*Appealingly*]. Irene, I wish that you could see your way clear to——

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

IRENE [*Near collapse again*]. No! No! I won't say a word — not a word.

RICHARD [*Impatiently*]. Confound it——

UNCLE. Now, wait a bit. In view of—er—certain circumstances confoundedly beyond my control I'd much rather not answer your last question.

RICHARD. I insist!

UNCLE. Positively?

RICHARD. Absolutely!

UNCLE. Very well. She told Miss Ladew because Miss Ladew was the young woman involved!

RICHARD. What!

UNCLE. That's right.

RICHARD. You're crazy!

UNCLE. Ask Irene.

[RICHARD looks at IRENE. She turns hastily away.]

RICHARD. What nonsense! Why, you both told me that she was engaged.

UNCLE. So we did.

RICHARD. And she told me so herself.

UNCLE. That's all right. She is engaged. She is engaged to Stuart.

RICHARD. What!

[*Outraged beyond all limits of endurance, sink-*

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

ing on the settee. IRENE, unable to endure any more, rushes into her room again, slamming the door after her and locking it.]

RICHARD. Are you crazy, or am I? Engaged to Stuart—Miss Ladew! Upon my soul, I——
[*Turns away struggling with the tendency to hysterical laughter.*]

UNCLE. Wait a bit, Dick. Come here. Did you ever hear of a hypochondriac?

RICHARD. Yes, but just now I can't think what it is.

UNCLE. A hypochondriac is a person who thinks he's ill when he isn't. He's usually a woman.

RICHARD. Well, what do I care——

UNCLE. Hsh! Listen! Irene is a hypochondriac.

RICHARD. Eh? How dare she?

UNCLE. Will you listen to me? She was convinced that she hadn't long to live. She thought nothing of herself. Her care was all for Stuart. She wanted to provide for his future. She wanted to make sure that after she was gone he would marry some good woman who would be kind to him.

RICHARD. Good heavens!

UNCLE. And she chose Miss Ladew.

RICHARD. Well, I'll be——

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

UNCLE. Naturally Miss Ladew was not delighted, but for reasons of her own she pretended to fall in with the scheme. Maybe you, being more or less of a conceited ass, can guess what those reasons were.

RICHARD [*Pluming himself a bit and laughing*]. Ah—er—well, it's the limit!

UNCLE [*Laughing*]. Need I go further?

RICHARD. You can't. It's the limit.

UNCLE. When Miss Ladew turned out more attractive than she at first had seemed, and trained her guns on Stuart, it didn't look good to our little Irene. Then she started to frighten the other woman out of it—and there you are.

RICHARD. Hm! Well, it strikes me I'd better have a few words with Miss Ladew. There are—er—one or two matters that need straightening out. Ha! ha! ha! Uncle John, you just tell her it'll be all right, will you?

[*They go out in the hall laughing boisterously. After pause STUART enters through the French window, chuckling to himself.*]

UNCLE J. *enters from the hall.*

UNCLE. Stuart, what's the matter?

STUART. I've seen Miss Ladew.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

UNCLE. O-ho!

STUART. What a notion! Poor little Irene!

UNCLE. So she told you?

STUART. Yes—how the mischief could Irene have thought such a thing?

UNCLE. What—thought what?

STUART. Why, that I was *flirting* with Miss Ladew? Why, I never saw the woman till three days ago.

UNCLE. So she told you that?

STUART. Yes—wasn't it true? It accounts for everything.

UNCLE. Did Miss Ladew say anything to you about being engaged?

STUART. Engaged? No! Is she engaged?

UNCLE. So I understand.

STUART. All right. I don't care if she's fifty times engaged. What I *want*, is to see Irene. [*Rises and goes to her door.*]

UNCLE. Now, my boy, don't be hasty.

STUART. Tut! Tut! You leave it to me. Poor little girl! She can't be quite right, you know—just leave it to me. Just you get her out and then you go away. Come back in a few minutes. Just you leave her to me.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

UNCLE. I don't *know* about that. What are you going to do?

STUART. Do! I'm going to break her down.

UNCLE. Break her down!

STUART. What she needs is a lesson.

UNCLE. I know. But I'm afraid you're a rotten bad teacher.

STUART. See here. I've seen Miss Ladew and I've found that I'm a horrible monster—[*amiably*]—now, naturally it's a good deal of a shock to me.

UNCLE. Naturally.

STUART. Well, you old practical joker, you weren't much help to me, you know.

UNCLE [*Nervously*]. Er—I scarcely think we'd better go into that.

STUART. No—I shouldn't think you would. However, now that I understand I'll pass over that. But, so far as Irene is concerned, I'm a horrible brute. I get drunk and come home and beat her up without knowing it, d'ye see? Now, if I can get her to think that I really believe all these disgusting things about myself, eh——

UNCLE [*Comprehending*]. Oh! Ha! Ha!

STUART. You see! I'm a ruffian. She said so herself. I'm the human limit, and my only defence

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

is that, on account of the liquor, I didn't know it. I'm going to pretend to throw myself on her mercy. You've never seen anybody grovel the way I will, and as sure as I am alive in five minutes I'll have her weeping in my arms and telling me all about it.

UNCLE [*Dubiously*]. Hm! It sounds promising.

STUART. It's a cinch! Come now, just you get her out.

UNCLE. All right, all right, but if it doesn't work——

STUART. Work! You don't know anything about women.

UNCLE. No, my dear fellow. *Nobody does!*

STUART. Work! Of course it will work. Leave her to me. I'll handle her with gloves, believe me.

UNCLE. All right, all right, but if it *shouldn't* work, don't blame me. [*At IRENE'S door.*] Irene, dear, I want to see you.

[STUART *steps out on the veranda.*
It's all right. Dick has gone away.

[*The door opens and IRENE appears.*
Come, dear, it's all right.

[*He takes her hand and leads her out.* STUART
comes back into the room.]

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

IRENE [*Still tearful*]. Oh, Uncle John, I don't know what to do. I don't know what to say. I——

[IRENE *sees* STUART and stops short, between going and staying.]

STUART [*Now very lugubrious and perfectly formal*]. Don't go, I beg of you. [*To* UNCLE J., *sotto voce*.] Get out.

[UNCLE J. *exits through the French window*. I wish to speak to you a moment. Won't you sit down?

[IRENE *sits timidly on chair L. of piano, crushing a tear-stained handkerchief in her hands*.]

Do not be alarmed. There is no occasion for alarm. I have not been drinking. I am quite master of myself. I can only regret that you thought it necessary to bar your door against me, and yet after what had occurred it was perhaps—[*he chokes up with emotion, then collects himself*—perhaps it was only natural.

IRENE [*Scarcely able to articulate*]. Wha—what do you mean?

STUART [*Sadly*]. And yet you must know that it would never have happened if it hadn't been—for the drink.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

IRENE. Eh?

STUART [*Appealing*]. You do believe that, don't you? Tell me you do. It will always be a comfort to me to know that you believe that.

IRENE. Oh! [*Scarcely able to keep from bursting into tears.*]

STUART. Poor little arm! [*Takes it and look at the black and blue mark.*] Poor little girl! What a brute I was!

IRENE [*Feebly*]. Oh—no, you weren't, S—Stuart. You know——

STUART [*Interrupting her*]. Ah, it's sweet of you to say that—so sweet—I shall always love to remember it. But I know now the terrible things I did. Of course, I don't remember them at all. It was the drink—the cursed drink!

[UNCLE J. *enters at back*. STUART *waves him out and he goes out again unobserved by*
IRENE.]

IRENE. Oh—oh—Stuart dear, I can't bear it! I——

STUART. There! There! I'm a brute to distress you so. And to think of your poor little Choco—dead—and poisoned by me! And I never knew it! And you suffered it all in silence—never reproached

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

me once—never uttered a word of complaint—yet more—you even lied for me to keep people from knowing the awful truth!

IRENE. Lied for you?

STUART. Yes—told people that poor Choco was killed by a trolley car when all the time I had—poisoned—him.

IRENE. Oh, I can't stand this. I——

STUART. Well, that's all over. It was the drink—the accursed drink! I didn't understand—I didn't know. I thought it wasn't anything so very awful to have a few sociable ones with the boys, and all this time I was coming home to you—to my dear little wife—and doing these unspeakable things! [*Covers his face with his hands.*] It makes me shudder to think what horrible crimes I may have committed and never have known it!

IRENE. Oh! Oh!

STUART. There—there! I didn't mean to make you cry. God knows you've had enough to bear from me! What I want now is to make the rest just as easy for you as I can.

IRENE. The—the rest?

STUART. Yes. [*Solemnly.*] That shall be my atonement.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

IRENE. Wh—what do you mean?

STUART. I mean—the divorce.

IRENE [*Rises*]. The d-d-divorce?

STUART. Of course—nothing else is possible.

IRENE. Wha—what are you t-talking about?

STUART. Ah, it's just like your sweet nature—
it's just like you.

IRENE. You mean to—to—to divorce me?

STUART. Of course not. You shall divorce
me.

IRENE. Oh! Oh!

STUART. But it won't be difficult. You can go
to Nevada. Of course you'll have to live in Reno
a year. But we'll make it as easy for you as we
can. You won't be lonely. And you'll find plenty
of society there. There's a first-class hotel sustained
entirely by New Yorkers who are hunting divorces.
Oh, the time will pass quickly enough. The year
will be up before you know——

IRENE [*Slowly going to him*]. But I don't want a
divorce! I won't have a divorce!

STUART. Ah, but I insist.

IRENE. You——

STUART. I must protect you in spite of yourself.
How can you go on living with a brute who comes

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

home and *beats* you and never *knows* it? [*She is baffled.*] The situation is impossible.

IRENE [*Struck by an idea, suspiciously*]. So, then, you insist on a divorce?

STUART. For your own good I do.

IRENE [*Coldly*]. Ah! I see! And you're quite sure that it's all on my account.

STUART. Why, of course! [*Begins to fear that his scheme may not be working so well, after all.*]

IRENE. Hm! There may be more than one way of looking at that.

STUART [*Flustered*]. I—I don't quite follow you.

IRENE [*Slowly to Stuart*]. She happened to be driving by! [*Goes to her door.*]

STUART [*Bewildered*]. Eh? What?

IRENE [*Opens her door*]. Wouldn't it be kind of me if I were to get a divorce, eh? Wouldn't it be obliging of me to set you free, eh? I suppose you think you're awfully clever, and I'm so stupid I can't see your game. But you'll find I'm not so stupid as you think. Divorce you! I should think not! Not I! Not in a thousand years! And you *can't* divorce me! You've no cause! And to think you supposed you could hoodwink me as easily as that—you and that woman! You'll see!

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

STUART. What woman?

IRENE [*Just about to close door, but opening quickly for the "last word".*] What woman? Ha! What woman? She'll hear from me, too. Don't you think she won't, either!

[*Goes into her room and slams door—locks it.*]

STUART. Good God! Emily Ladew!

UNCLE J. [*Coming in from the veranda*]. Did it work?

STUART. Bah!

UNCLE. Oh, it didn't work.

STUART. Oh, you——

UNCLE. You will please to note that I refrain from saying—I told you so.

STUART. Very kind of you, I'm sure.

UNCLE. If you knew what it cost me—— Well, have a drink and forget it.

STUART [*Struck by an idea*]. Do you know—I think that's a good idea.

UNCLE. Of course it is.

STUART. A first-class idea.

UNCLE. Well, I'm waiting to hear how the great scheme fell through.

STUART [*Drinks*]. Oh! Are you?

UNCLE. I am. I deserve that much reward at least.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

STUART [*Filling his glass again*]. Well, you'll never find out from me. [*Drinks.*]

UNCLE. See here, my boy. I said have a drink — not *all* the drinks.

STUART. Pshaw! You seem to forget that I'm a dipsomaniac. [*Drinks.*]

UNCLE. Nonsense!

STUART. Yes, sir, that's what they all say. [*Drinks again.*]

UNCLE [*Getting worried*]. But, my dear chap, of course, you and I know that's absurd.

STUART [*Drinks again*]. Oh, I don't know. Dip-somaniac, eh? I'll show 'em. You'll see.

UNCLE [*Trying to stop him*]. But, my dear Stuart, really if I were you I wouldn't do quite so much of that sort of thing. Really, I——

STUART. Oh, you wouldn't, eh? Well, I don't know that I value your advice so awfully highly. And see here, don't you forget that I've got a reputation to live up to. [*Drinks the last of the whiskey.*]

UNCLE. Er—come, now, my dear boy, do be reasonable.

STUART. Reasonable! Ha! [*Takes up decanter, finds it empty.*] Reasonable! Well—empty! Well, I know where there's more, all right. [*Starts up.*]

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

UNCLE [*Follows him in trepidation*]. Stuart, my dear fellow, really now, I do so hope you're not going to do anything rash.

STUART. Rash! Eh? Rash! You'll see. [*Strides off through the French window, followed by UNCLE J.*]

UNCLE. I say now, upon my word!

[*Follows him in great agitation. As they go out, IRENE enters arranging her hat.*]

IRENE. I'll just go now and see what Dick has to say about this.

[*Turns to go, sees STUART'S photo on piano, knocks it down as she passes and goes out into the hall. UNCLE J. reënters from the veranda and taps on IRENE'S door.*]

UNCLE. Irene, it's your Uncle John. Irene!

[*No answer. He opens door, sees room empty, closes door. NORA enters.*]

Why, where the deuce—— [*Sees NORA.*] Oh, Nora, did you happen to meet any one in the hall just now?

NORA. Yes, sir. Mrs. Randolph.

UNCLE. Where was she going?

NORA. To see Mr. Richard, I think, sir.

UNCLE. Nora, you told me when I came here I'd see things. [*Dryly.*] Well, I'm seeing them.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

[*He goes into the hall, followed by NORA. Enter from the veranda RICHARD and MISS LADEW, both in evening dress.*]

RICHARD. My dearest girl, I'm sure it's going to be quite all right.

MISS LADEW. I'm not so sure of that.

RICHARD [*They both sit*]. Why, I've heard her say myself that you were her dearest friend.

MISS LADEW. My dear Richard, do you think that means anything?

RICHARD. Eh?

MISS LADEW. Between women?

RICHARD. Oh! Say now —

MISS LADEW. I've had at least half a dozen dearest friends, and I hate 'em all like poison.

RICHARD. Well, anyhow, we've got to take the chance. I've got you again and I'm not going to give you up for a hundred sisters.

MISS LADEW. I'm a hundred to one shot.

RICHARD. Precisely. By the way, have you still got that ring you took off in Geneva?

MISS LADEW. Ha! Ha! Yes, I've still got it.

RICHARD. Well, suppose you put it on again, eh?

MISS LADEW. At the earliest opportunity.

RICHARD. That's a dear. [*Puts his arm around*

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

her.] Do you know there's something about you that I like?

MISS LADEW. Fancy that, now, and what's that?

Enter UNCLE JOHN *at rear.*

RICHARD [*Embracing*]. My arms.

[EMILY *sees* UNCLE J., and RICHARD *turns.*

They are hand in hand.]

Uncle John, we're engaged!

UNCLE. Well, I hope so.

RICHARD. Ha! Ha! Ha! Where's Irene? We want to tell her.

UNCLE. I've no idea. She's not in her room. I looked. [*Opens door L. 1, then closes it.*]

RICHARD. That's odd.

[STUART's voice is heard outside, singing somewhat uncertainly: "*My bonnie lies over the ocean, my bonnie lies over the sea.*"]

MISS LADEW. It's Stuart!

RICHARD. Stewed!

[STUART comes unsteadily in from the veranda.

UNCLE. Stuart!

STUART. How d'you do?

MISS LADEW. Oh, Lord!

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

[STUART *sees her, turns, removes his hat, and bows very politely.*]

STUART. Ladies!

RICHARD. Second sight! [*To EMILY.*] It will never do for Irene to see him like this.

MISS LADEW. I'll go and watch out for her. This is no place for me.

[*Exits through French window. STUART sits back of table.*]

STUART. Nice day, what?

RICHARD. Stuart, where did you get it?

STUART. That's it, I'm drunk. Haven't been drunk 'n years.

UNCLE. Oh! Don't say that.

STUART. I 'sure you. Pos'tively.

UNCLE. What?

STUART. Pos'tively. No, sir, not 'n years. To-day's the day, though, eh, what?

UNCLE. What the deuce 'll we do with him?

[*RICHARD goes out on the veranda and looks right and left to see if any one is coming.*]

STUART. D'ye know, Uncle John, I was trying to think wha's the matter with me? Ev' been drunk Uncle John?

UNCLE. No, certainly not. That is—seldom.

STUART. Seldom? How often's that?

UNCLE. Well, that's not often.

[STUART starts to sing, "*My bonnie lies over the ocean.*" UNCLE J. stops him by putting his hand over his mouth. The moment UNCLE J. removes his hand, STUART starts singing. This sort of thing happens two or three times.]

STUART. Uncle John, y'know I'm a very strong man.

UNCLE. Yes, yes, of course, of course.

STUART. Bet I c'd lift you 'th one han'.

UNCLE. No doubt! No doubt!

STUART. Dick, bet I c'n lif' you an' Miss Ladew tied together 'th one han'.

RICHARD [*Anxiously*]. Haven't a doubt of it, old fellow.

STUART. One hand, d'ye see? [*Singing.*] "*My bonnie lies over the ocean, my——*"

RICHARD and UNCLE. Hsh! Hsh! You mustn't do that!

STUART [*Beginning to weep*]. Oh, I'm so mel'n-choly.

[UNCLE J. puts STUART's hat on.]

Oh—oh—oh—oh! Trouble. Got some big trouble.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

Can't think what 't is—— Wha's my trouble, Uncle John?

UNCLE. Here, come on, let's take him into his room.

[As they take him toward door L. 3 E, STUART says:]

STUART. I don't want to go in my room. There's something about that wallpaper makes me seasick.

[They force him through door. RICHARD remains on scene. UNCLE J. exits with STUART.]

RICHARD *[Relieved]*. Oh Lord!

MISS L. *enters through window.*

MISS LADEW. Look out, I think she's coming!

[Crash is heard in STUART'S room.]

RICHARD. Gee! It's a close shave. I can't think what's come over him. Something must have happened.

MISS LADEW. Something has happened to us, dear. *[They embrace.]*

IRENE *enters from the hall. Stops short at seeing them.*

IRENE. Oh!

RICHARD. My dear Sis, we're engaged.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

IRENE [*Coming to meet Miss L.*]. Oh, you darling.
[*Embraces her.*]

MISS LADEW. Sure you don't mind?

IRENE [*Delighted*]. Mind? It's adorable!

MISS LADEW. I feared you might think it disloyal to you after our—our little arrangements.

IRENE. Oh, no! No, I don't mind in the least. After all, a woman must follow her heart, I suppose.

MISS LADEW. It's awfully good of you to take it that way.

IRENE. Nonsense, don't be silly. Where's Stuart? Have you seen him, Dick?

RICHARD. No—o—o, I—I haven't.

IRENE. I rather want to see him. There are one or two little matters—he must be in his room.

[*Starts toward his door as UNCLE J. enters and stops her. RICHARD and MISS L. speak as IRENE goes toward door.*]

RICHARD and MISS L. No, no, you mustn't do that!

IRENE. What's the matter?

UNCLE. Now, you mustn't be alarmed.

IRENE. It's Stuart. Something's happened to him! I'll go to him at once!

UNCLE. Not for worlds!

IRENE. Eh?

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

RICHARD. No, no, indeed, it's quite impossible.

IRENE. But why not, why not, I say?

UNCLE. Well, the fact is—you see he—he's not feeling quite himself.

IRENE. What do you mean?

UNCLE. Well, the truth is he—he's ill.

IRENE. Ill? Oh!

UNCLE. Yes—yes—doctor says he's evidently suffered some sort—er—er—severe mental shock.

IRENE. Oh, it's all my fault!

[*Sinks on chair R. of table. Almost in tears, turns to MISS L. for comfort.*]

MISS LADEW. There, there, dear! You mustn't distress yourself.

UNCLE. The doctor has given him a sleeping powder. Says he's quite sure he'll be all right in the morning. They always are, but he positively must not be waked.

IRENE. Well, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to take my things off, and then I'm going to sit right outside his door till he wakes.

[*UNCLE J. whispers to MISS L.; she then goes to the door of IRENE's room, and opens it.*]

RICHARD. My dear Sis, you mustn't do that, you'll fag yourself all out.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

IRENE. Oh, no, I won't. I'm awfully strong, you know.

[IRENE and MISS L. go into IRENE'S room. As the door closes behind them, STUART'S voice is heard off, singing that his bonnie lies over th' ocean.]

RICHARD. Good Lord, we can't leave him in there!

UNCLE. By George, no!

RICHARD. He'll give the whole snap away.

UNCLE. I have it. I'll take him to my room and lock him up.

RICHARD. How the devil are you going to get him back again?

UNCLE. Eh?

RICHARD. She's got to find him in his room in the morning.

UNCLE. Smuggle him through his bedroom window when he's sobered up.

RICHARD. Fine!

[The two rush into STUART'S room and immediately emerge with him. He has on a bathrobe. As they enter with STUART, he speaks.]

STUART. Hello, Little Sunshine.

UNCLE. Come along now, old chap.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

STUART [*Protesting*]. I don' want to come along.

RICHARD. There, there, there, it'll be all right!

STUART. Want to go to bed— I'm awful tired.

UNCLE. We'll all go to bed.

[*Taking STUART toward door into the hall.*]

STUART. D'you mean it?

UNCLE. Certainly, certainly!

RICHARD. Of course, of course!

STUART. Sure you're not foolin'?

UNCLE. No, no, no!

STUART. All right then. I hate foolin'.

[*Cuckoo appears from the clock and begins to call. As the bird starts calling, STUART lunges at it; is stopped by RICHARD and UNCLE J.*]

STUART. Uncle John, I'll kill that damn bird.

[*UNCLE J. picks STUART up and carries him off. RICHARD remains on scene.*]

RICHARD [*As the other two go out.*] Don't forget to lock him in.

MISS L. and IRENE enter from IRENE'S room.

MISS LADEW. Now, dear, you really mustn't worry about him; he's sure to be all right—eh, Dick?

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

IRENE [*Anxiously*]. Oh, do you think so, Dick?

RICHARD. Certainly; no doubt of it at all.

IRENE. He must! He must! If anything happened to him I should never forgive myself.

MISS LADEW. Nonsense! I can't see how you're to blame.

IRENE. No, you wouldn't.

UNCLE JOHN *enters*

IRENE. Oh, Uncle John, Uncle John!

UNCLE. Oh, it's all right. Seen lots of cases just like it. Had one myself once.

MISS LADEW. You?

UNCLE [*Gallantly*]. Long ago, when I knew your charming mother. [IRENE *replaces the photograph of STUART she had previously knocked over.*]

UNCLE [*Aside to RICHARD*]. You go get your dinner, then come back and let me go. It would never do to let her enter that room.

RICHARD. Well, Emily and I must be running along. By-by, Sis, and remember you are not to worry.

IRENE. I'll try.

MISS LADEW [*To IRENE*]. After all, *you're* the wife for him.

IRENE. Yes, dear, I think so, too.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

MISS LADEW. And, you see, I'm going to be in the family anyhow.

RICHARD [*As he and MISS L. go up*]. I'll look in later. Ta, ta, Uncle John.

MISS LADEW. Good-night, dear Uncle John.

[*They go out through French windows. By this time the summer night is closing in. The sunset seen through the windows has almost faded, and the room is growing shadowy.*]

IRENE [*Turns the switch that lights the chandelier, then goes to R. of piano, picks up her work-basket.*] You needn't stay, Uncle John.

UNCLE [*Seated L. of table*]. Catch me deserting you at a time like this!

[*IRENE goes to chair L. of piano, sits, and commences to sew. Enter NORA with silver tray containing IRENE'S medicine.*]

NORA. It's the hour for the green medicine, ma'am!

IRENE. Take it away —

NORA. Ma'am!

IRENE. And throw it away.

NORA. Very well, ma'am. And the red medicine?

IRENE. Yes, throw away all the medicines and

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

powders. I shall not require them now, or at any future time.

[With a wondering look, NORA goes out.]

UNCLE JOHN gets up, wanders out on the veranda to sniff the air. IRENE rises and tries to sneak to STUART'S door, but he heads her off].

IRENE [*Pleadingly*]. I'd love to see him—just for a moment.

UNCLE. Oh, it wouldn't do at all. The slightest noise might wake him.

IRENE [*Appealingly*]. You're sure he isn't going to die?

UNCLE. Die? Nonsense! There isn't a chance.

IRENE [*Returns to her chair and takes up her work again*]. After all—[*with a sigh of relief*—she only happened to be driving by.

UNCLE. I never thought anything else.

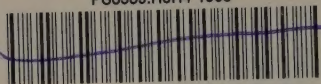
IRENE [*Listening*]. Sh! Dear boy! How quietly he sleeps!

VERY SLOW CURTAIN.



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